METAPHYSICS AND TRAGEDY IN ARISTOTLE'S IDEAL STATE

by

MARCUS HINES

(Under the Direction of Edward Halper)

ABSTRACT

In *Politics* VII.15, Aristotle claims that the citizens of the ideal state need philosophy for their leisure, but as an activity practiced by all the citizens, philosophy in this context cannot be a theoretical science such as metaphysics. Aristotle does not say precisely in what the citizens' leisure activity is to consist, but in *Politics* VIII he discusses the role of music in the state, and argues that one of its functions is to provide a leisure activity. In this dissertation, I argue that for Aristotle the content of philosophical leisure is tragedy, which is one form of music.

I argue that according to Aristotle's account in the *Poetics*, tragedy generates a kind of philosophical activity in the audience through wonder. Although a neglected theme in the *Poetics*, for Aristotle the final cause of tragedy is to provoke wonder. Furthermore, the practice of philosophy as Aristotle presents it in the *Metaphysics* both begins and ends with wonder. Wonder is first an awareness of an apparent contradiction or intellectual impasse that motivates philosophical inquiry, and second is an appreciation for the beauty of the unmoved mover that sustains contemplation. I argue that, according to Aristotle's account of tragedy, both these dimensions of wonder are analogously present in tragedy.

On my interpretation, the wonder in tragedy is the impasse that the tragic hero's distinguishing character trait is simultaneously a virtue and a vice. The insight compels the

viewer to search for a solution in order to undermine the contradiction. The solution for Aristotle is that virtue and happiness are internal moral states rather than external goods, an insight that follows from the instability of external goods as displayed in tragedy and the assumption that happiness is stable. Aristotle associates this assumption with tragedy in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.10. The insight is valuable for the classical Greek mind, which inherits the Homeric tendency to identify virtue and happiness with the external goods of political status and wealth. The conclusion is that, according to Aristotle's thought, tragedy contributes to the audience's recognition of the moral and ethical dimension of human nature.

INDEX WORDS: Aristotle, leisure, *Politics*, metaphysics, music, tragedy, *Poetics*, wonder

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DEDICATION

To my children, Erik and Anastasia.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Politics* VII.15 and VIII.3, Aristotle argues that the final end of the best city[1] is leisure (σχολή), for which the citizens will need the appropriate virtue. As war is for the sake of peace, so occupation (ἀσχολία) is for the sake of leisure (1334a14-16, cf. *NE* 1177b4-6); leisure is more choice-worthy than and is the end of occupation (1337b33-34). Courage, temperance, and justice are all virtues necessary for leisure, without which leisure is not even possible – there is no leisure for slaves, and the citizens are likely to be enslaved without the virtue necessary to defend themselves (1334a20-22). Moral virtue is clearly necessary for leisure, but Aristotle argues that leisure requires more than these moral virtues. As the content of leisure, the appropriate leisure activity (διαγωγή, 1334a17) is for its own sake. Leisure seems to contains happiness; one who is always busy with some occupation does not have the end he aims at, while happiness is the end (1338a1-6). In other words, leisure ought to be spent in some kind of activity that is not toilsome, but is an end in itself. The moral virtues do not suffice because their activity is toilsome (ἄσχολος, *NE* 1177b8, 12), and so Aristotle claims that the citizens will need philosophy for their leisure (*Pol.* 1334a23, 32).

Today we generally assume that there is no single, well-defined end for everyone or for a political community as a whole. Leisure is thought of as free time that has no inherent purpose, and is spent equally well on any number of different activities. We see the problem of how best to occupy our leisure as a question of what would give us the most pleasure. For Aristotle on the

1 I use the terms “state” and “city” synonymously. Neither is an entirely adequate translation of πόλις, but I take Aristotle’s political thought to be relevant to communities outside the city-states of classical Greece.

other hand, there is a definite kind of activity appropriate to leisure that is inherently worthwhile. The final end of the state is the same as that of the individual citizen (1324a5-8), namely happiness (εὐδαιμονία), which he defines as an activity of reason (*NE* 1098a7-20). Leisure therefore ought to be occupied in some kind of rational activity. However, it is not clear how philosophy can be the final end for the entire citizens body, even if in the case of the ideal state, since in *Politics* VII and VIII Aristotle is not constructing a city of philosophers, as Plato does in the *Republic*.[2]

Let me explain the problem more fully. Happiness is a rational activity that is for its own sake, but according to Aristotle there are two rational activities done for their own sakes: the virtuous political activity of moral virtue and philosophical contemplation of intellectual virtue. These two kinds of happiness are quite distinct, and although both are an exercise of reason, they are not rational in the same way. Aristotle prioritizes contemplation over the political live because the former is more fully an exercise of reason, and is the end of the latter. Political activity does exercise reason insofar as the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom is involved in all the moral virtues (*NE* 1044b24-28) and so is for its own sake, it is not only for its own sake but "sees to it that contemplative wisdom comes about" (ὁρᾷ ὅπως γένηται, 1145a8-9) – that is to say, practical wisdom is for the sake of contemplative wisdom.

It follows that the leisurely activity that constitutes the final end of the best city must be contemplative, and a philosophical activity of some sort. But of what sort? As an exercise of reason fully for its own sake, philosophy includes the theoretical sciences of physics,

2 Joseph Owens ("Aristotle on Leisure," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1981, 713-723)) explains the relation between work, recreation, and leisure in Aristotle's thought well, but concludes that it was an open question in Aristotle's mind as to precisely what kind of intellectual activity leisure should be spent in. I will attempt to give definition to this activity by arguing that for Aristotle leisure activity for the citizen body centers on Greek tragedy, though not to the exclusion of other intellectual activities, but in imitation of metaphysical reflection.

mathematics, or metaphysics, according to Aristotle's list of sciences that go by the name of "philosophy" at *Metaphysics* 1026a18-19. Metaphysics, which Aristotle defines as knowledge of the highest causes (*Met.* 981b27-29) and as knowledge of being qua being (1003a21-22), would be the best possible use for leisure, since it is prior to all other sciences. And yet, Aristotle assumes that most citizens will not be capable of theoretical wisdom.[3] If Aristotle's view is that the only activity proper to leisure is theoretical science, because it alone is more of an end in itself than political activity, then most citizens will not be able to spend leisure in a way that is inherently valuable without reference to some other activity. In that case, given that leisure is not the toilsome exercise of the moral virtues, the leisure activity of most citizens would have only instrumental value. It would be at best a relaxing amusement that prepares the citizens for further toil. The leisure activity of most citizens would have to be for the sake of their own political activity outside leisure. However, if political activity is itself already inherently worthwhile, for Aristotle leisure cannot have merely instrumental value, since he characterizes it as being for its own sake and as the end of political activity. In order to understand Aristotle's account of the highest end practiced by the citizen body of the ideal state rather than a philosophical or scientific elite, we must find another kind of rational activity that could be the content of the citizens' leisure time – one that is in some way contemplative and philosophical, but is not theoretical science.[4]

It follows that "philosophy" in *Politics* VII.15 does not have the sense it usually carries, but must instead refer to a lower form of contemplation. According to Aristotle's argument, the citizens need a leisure activity that is more of an end in itself and better than the exercise of the

3 See *Politics* 1333a16-30.

4 I do not mean to suggest that Aristotle would exclude metaphysics and the sciences from the state. My point is only that these pursuits are not enough for the welfare of the whole citizen body.

moral virtues, but that is not a scientific pursuit. Scholars have generally not recognized that Aristotle's city must contain an end that is neither political nor theoretical. The difficulty of interpretation is partly due to the fact that we do not have the full text of *Politics* VIII. Despite the incomplete state of the text, Aristotle gives us enough material to work with in the rest of the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* so that our reconstruction of Aristotle's though regarding leisure is not blind. The basic structure of Aristotle's thought about what is and is not worthwhile along with his comments on leisure and education provide us with a firm basis for reconstructing Aristotle's thought.

Aristotle gives us an important clue to how he thinks of philosophy in *Politics* VII.15 and book VIII. The relevant question after arguing that the city needs a leisure activity is how the citizens are to be educated so as to be able to spend their leisure well (*Pol.* 1334b3-5), and in *Politics* VIII, where he addresses the ideal city's program of education, music (μουσική) is the centerpiece. The Greek word μουσική has a wider semantic range than our "music," and can refer not only to music in the sense of tune or song but to poetry and even what we would call literature. In the Classical period, μουσική refers to any art and its product that comes from the Muses, especially poetry, even when it is without song or instrumental accompaniment.[5] Plato and Aristotle give us examples of the broad extension of μουσική. Plato uses the term μουσική to refer to Socrates' verse adaptation of a fable of Aesop's (*Phaedo* 61a-b). In the *Ion* Plato uses the term for the recitation of Homeric epic by rhapsodes like Ion (530a). Socrates includes the tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus in his discussion of the role of μουσική in the city (*Republic* 379a, 381d). Aristotle implies that there is a distinction between μουσική that has

5 See Penelope Murray, "The Muses and their Arts," in *Music and the Muses: The Culture of 'Mousikē' in the Classical Athenian City*, ed. Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson (Oxford University Press, 2004), for a discussion of the gradual expansion of the term throughout the ancient period to include more arts.

rhythm and melody, and that which has neither rhythm nor melody, when he says that music, being an imitation, can affect the soul "even without rhythms and melodies themselves" (καὶ χωρὶς τῶν ῥυθμῶν καὶ τῶν μελῶν αὐτῶν) (*Pol.* 1340a13-14).[6] There is no "music" in the sense of song or tune without melody, but Aristotle's comment shows that there can be μουσική. Aristotle and Plato take it for granted that a poetic art can be μουσική independent of melody. I will use "music" primarily in the Greek sense, as equivalent to μουσική.[7]

We can see from the text that music is relevant to the nature of the citizens' leisure activity, because music is the highest part of the account Aristotle gives of the best city's educational program. By making music the centerpiece of education, Aristotle suggests that the leisured activity he calls "philosophy" in *Politics* VII.15 is inherently tied to music. In Aristotle's mind, music is somehow associated with philosophy, a surprising claim if we think of music as primarily a matter of feeling (πάθος) and of the senses, and philosophy as thinking rather than feeling or sensing.

I will attempt to solve the problem of the content of leisure and show how music is united with philosophy in leisure by considering Aristotle's account of tragedy in the *Poetics*. This is a promising approach, not only due to the convenience that the extant portion of the *Poetics* deals with tragedy, while no other analysis of any part of music in Aristotle's extant works is nearly as

6 My translation. Here, Reeve translates Aristotle here as "even when the rhythms and melodies these representations contain are taken in isolation [from the λόγων]," supposing that Aristotle means there is music without words. He apparently adopts Susemihl's suggested emendation of the line on the basis of a lacuna in one manuscript, though without transposing it as Susemihl and Hicks do (Franz Susemihl and R. D. Hicks, *The Politics of Aristotle* (Cambridge, 1894), 592). The emendation seems unnecessary. As Lord points out (*Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, 89), it makes no sense that Aristotle would here emphasize the effect of tunes by themselves, only a few lines after mentioning the effect of the tunes of Olympus, which were themselves tunes played on the αὐλός. For a defense of the emendation, see Andrew Ford, "Catharsis: The Power of Music in Aristotle's *Politics*," in *Music and the Muses: The Culture of 'Mousikē' in the Classical Athenian City*, ed. Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson (Oxford University Press, 2004), 320-325.

7 See Carnes Lord's *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle* (Cornell University Press, 1992), 85-89 for a good discussion of the meaning of music in Greek culture.

full, but also because on Aristotle's account of it, tragedy appears to be the highest, most complete form of music. Tragedy contains all the elements through which other poetic arts make imitations, namely speech (λόγος), harmony (ἁρμονία), and rhythm (ῥυθμός), while no other poetic art, with the exception of comedy, has all these elements: flute playing does not have speech,[8] and dance does not have harmony or speech (*Poetics* 1447a21-28). Tragedy is even more complete than epic because it has music in the narrow sense of song and a visual element (ὄψις) (1462a14-17). Completeness is a sign of superiority for Aristotle, so tragedy is superior to all these other arts.[9] Moreover, tragedy is of such a magnitude that we can see the whole work at once (1451a3-6, cf. 1462a18-1462b3), an attribute that makes tragedy more beautiful than epic. Though he does not fully explain what he means, Aristotle's comment that tragedy is more philosophical than history (1451b5-7) implies that tragedy is philosophical. Tragedy is therefore a good candidate for the leisure activity Aristotle prescribes for the city. Furthermore, there is a textual connection between the *Politics* and the *Poetics*. At *Politics* VIII 1341b38-40 Aristotle alludes to the *Poetics* and mentions theater at 1342a15-18, so tragedy is not far from his mind in the relevant chapters of the *Politics*. It is therefore reasonable to take tragedy as the centerpiece of the citizens' leisure. Although something is lost in not approaching the problem through other forms of music, my hope is that tragedy can provide a paradigm for understanding how other forms might contribute to the citizens' leisure activity.

Turning to tragedy does not immediately solve the problem of how the city's final end can be philosophical, but raises the same issue of associating philosophy with music in general

8 "Flute" is the usual translation for the αὐλός, which was actually a reed instrument. Aristotle does not mean that speech cannot be combined with flute playing. The point is that in itself playing the flute is distinct from whatever wording might accompany it, although both flute playing alone and flute playing as accompaniment to poetry each count as music.

9 Aristotle may have seen comedy as equal to tragedy. The second part of the *Poetics* was written on comedy, but this part is lost, so I will discuss only tragedy.

that I mentioned above: music is about producing emotion, while philosophy is an exercise of the intellect. Based on Aristotle's own account of tragedy, it appears that the end of tragedy is its emotional effect on the audience insofar as the end is catharsis from fear and pity by the tragedy's provocation of these emotions in the audience (*Poetics* 1450a27-28). In order to address this problem, I will look to passages in the *Metaphysics* in which Aristotle comments on the nature of contemplation and how it arises. My claim is that a key element shared by the accounts of tragedy in the *Poetics* and of philosophical contemplation in the *Metaphysics* is the notion of wonder. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says that wonder lies at the beginning of inquiry (982b11-21) and at the end (1072b22-26). It is first what motivates thought and the search for truth, and second is an experience of the highest activity of the human intellect when in contact with the best object of that intellect, i.e. the unmoved mover. Furthermore, although it has not received much attention in the literature on the *Poetics*, wonder is one of this text's central themes. Aristotle says tragedy produces fear and pity more effectively when what happens in the tragedy is more of a source of wonder (1452a1-7, 1460a11-12). As a theme common to both the *Poetics* and the *Metaphysics*, and as a spur to intellectual inquiry, wonder provides a promising avenue of interpretation.

In the first chapter, I will set out the problem fully. I will argue that it is not clear how the leisure activity Aristotle discusses in *Politics* VII.15 fits the two accounts of happiness he gives in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. It cannot be the contemplation of *Metaphysics* E.1, which is divided into physics, mathematics, and metaphysics (1026a18-19), but has to be a lower sort of contemplation appropriate for the citizens in general. I will then argue that Aristotle's discussion of education and the place of music in education in *Politics* VIII show that he thinks

the object of this kind of contemplation is dependent on music, specifically tragedy, for its object. The problem thus becomes how tragedy can bring about contemplation in the audience of citizens, rather than being limited to its appeal to the senses or to its power over the emotions. I will then show that scholars have not seen the problem of how to make sense of leisure in the best city clearly. They have not shown how tragedy can be the centerpiece of that leisure within the bounds that Aristotle sets.

In the second chapter, I will argue that one of the essential features of tragedy in Aristotle's account is the wonder it provokes in the audience. I will show how the text of the *Poetics* clearly demonstrates the central place wonder has in Aristotle's account, despite the relative lack of attention it has received. I will also discuss the two kinds of wonder in the *Metaphysics*, namely intellectual impasse (ἀπορία) at an apparent contradiction and amazement in the face of beauty and argue that in Aristotle's view, something like both the wonder that motivates thought in *Metaphysics* A.2 and the wonder that arises out of reflection on the unmoved mover in *Metaphysics* Λ.7 are at work in the viewer's experience of tragedy. I will argue that fear and pity work together to make this wonder apparent to the audience, and give a brief note on how I interpret catharsis in light of the notion of wonder.

In the third and last chapter, I will explain what the wonder in tragedy is and how it enables tragedy to provide an intellectual activity that can be reasonably called philosophy. I will argue that tragedy presents a problem to the audience through reversal, through which tragedy displays the tragic hero's distinctive character trait, e.g. Oedipus' wisdom, as both a virtue and a vice. This is an apparent contradiction that naturally provokes the audience to attempt to resolve the contradiction. I will argue that tragedy points to the further insight that,

contrary to the traditional Greek view inherited from Homer, virtue is an inner state and a moral dimension of a human being. Homer tends to treat virtue and happiness as external actions and external goods, and the Greeks of the 5th and 4th centuries inherit this ambiguity. I will argue that tragedy shows that virtue and happiness are not external goods by making use of the assumption that happiness is stable, a claim Aristotle analyzes carefully in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.10 and that some tragedies refer to. The insight generates a wondrous contemplation regarding what it means to be human that is both worth reflecting on for its own sake and that Aristotle thinks is morally valuable for the citizens of the ideal city. Most of my effort will focus on explaining tragic wonder in the sense of an apparent contradiction, but the contemplative wonder emerges naturally out of the insight that comes from puzzling over that problem and arriving at the solution.

CHAPTER 1

I. Practical and Contemplative Happiness

Aristotle argues that there are two basic kinds of activities that constitute happiness, contemplation[10] and political activity.[11] These activities are each final ends, so to determine what the philosophy that occupies the leisure of the best city is, we must consider the nature of these two activities. Both contemplation and political activity are happiness because they are each an exercise of reason for its own sake. In *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7, Aristotle defines happiness as the exercise of reason in accordance with virtue (1098a7-20). He thinks of happiness in terms of the human function (ἔργον). As the flute player succeeds insofar as he performs the function that defines him as a flute player, success for a human as such lies in performing the function that defines human nature (1097b24-28). There must be a function that defines what it means to be human, given that a human is a unified whole, rather than an assortment of unordered functions

10 See *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7-8.

11 See *Nichomachean Ethics* I.1-2, 7. The question naturally arises as to how these two kinds of happiness relate to each other. Some scholars attempt to resolve the issue of the relation between the two forms of happiness by arguing for either the "inclusive" or the "dominant" ("intellectualist") interpretations of Aristotle's view of happiness. For defenses of the inclusivist interpretation, see J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 60 (1974): 339-359 (reprinted in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Rorty, (University of California Press, 1980); David Keyt, "Intellectualism in Aristotle," in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. John P. Anton and Anthony Preus, vol. 2 (SUNY Press, 1983), 364-387; Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 374-377; David DePew "Politics, Music, and Contemplation in Aristotle's Ideal State," in *A Companion to Aristotle's* Politics, ed. David Keyt and Fred D. Miller, Jr. (Blackwell, 1991). On the other hand, Anthony Kenny (*The Aristotelian Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 190-214) argues that the conception of happiness as contemplation is dominant in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. W. F. R. Hardie ("The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics," *Philosophy*, vol. 40, no. 154, (1965): 277-295) argues that confusion between inclusive and dominant conceptions of happiness is inherent to Aristotle's thought. Edward Halper argues that seeing happiness as an actuality, a unity that is its own end, undermines the debate between the two interpretations ("The Substance of Aristotle's Ethics," in *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature*, ed. May Sim (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1995), 13-14). My aim is not to decide this issue, but only to highlight the two kinds of happiness in Aristotle's thought.

(e.g. carpentry, the sense of sight, etc.) (1097b28-33). What is the one function that makes a human be human? It cannot be the growth and reproduction of the body, since that function is common to plants and other animals as well as humans, nor can it be the use of the senses, since all of them are shared with other animals. Unlike all other animals, humans by nature have the capacity to reason, so reason is the function that defines human nature (1097b33-1098a4). Finally, while happiness is defined in terms of the function of reason, because not all humans reason well, not all are happy. Happiness is using reason well, which is to say that it is rational activity in accordance with virtue (1098a7-12). Because the soul has parts, one part of which does the reasoning and one which is able to respond to reason but does not itself reason, happiness has to be defined as the activity of the part of the soul that reasons by itself, rather than the part that responds to reason (1098a3-5). There are many virtues, so happiness is above all the activity in accordance with the best and most complete virtue (1098a17-18). With this account of happiness, Aristotle shows how happiness is complete in the sense that everything else is for its sake while it is not for the sake of anything else (1097a34-1097b6), and self-sufficient in the sense that it contains in itself everything desirable for life so that we have no reason to seek for anything more than happiness (1097b6-21). The activity of reason is both complete and self-sufficient, because there is nothing better for a human than to function well as a human.

I will start by analyzing Aristotle's arguments in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7-8 and *Politics* VII.2-3 that the contemplative life is a form of happiness as defined in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7, since it exercises reason more fully than the practical life. In *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7 Aristotle elaborates on the argument in I.7. He argues that happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, specifically the highest virtue, since some virtues are better than others. The value of any virtue

depends on the part of the soul it is the virtue of: the better the part of the soul, the better its virtue, so the best part of the soul has the best virtue. The highest part of the soul and that by which we know most fully and engage in the highest rational activity is intellect (νοῦς), so its activity of contemplation when in accordance with intellectual virtue is happiness (1177a12-21). Contemplation also displays the features of self-sufficiency and completeness, which Aristotle presents as standards for happiness in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7. Contemplation is self-sufficient because it does not depend greatly on external goods such as wealth, friends, and occasion for action, as the life of moral virtue does (1177a27-1177b1). Contemplation is also complete, and acts only for its own sake, aiming at nothing other than itself (1177b1-2). This is essentially an elaboration of the argument in I.7. By both standards, political activity, which is a life of moral virtue, is also a form of happiness, though it is less of an end in itself than contemplation, as I will explain below.

Aristotle argues in the *Politics* as well as the *Nicomachean Ethics* that contemplation is a form of happiness. In *Politics* VII.1 he raises the question of what the best form of life is, and argues that it is a life of virtue. Because virtue is moral and intellectual, Aristotle has to consider whether the best life is one of moral virtue or of intellectual virtue. He defends the contemplative life as a life of happiness again on the basis of its being complete and self-sufficient. Happiness is doing well (εὐπραγία), and so the happy life is one of action (πρακτικός) (1325b14-16). Although it appears to some to "do nothing" (1325a21), the contemplative life is active, albeit not in the sense that it seeks to accomplish some end outside itself, as the life of moral virtue does. Moreover, contemplation is more active than the practical life of moral virtue, *because* contemplation does not aim at anything else, but is for its own sake

alone (1325b16-21). Besides being complete it is also less dependent on other people than the practical life is. The active life is not necessarily directed toward others (1325b16-17), as is the practical life, which is essentially about deliberating and acting well in a community. Clearly, according to Aristotle's arguments in the *Politics*, as well as the *Nicomachean Ethics*, contemplation is a complete and self-sufficient activity. In *Nicomachean Ethics* X.8 Aristotle emphasizes the superiority of contemplation over political activity, arguing that it is the highest form of happiness because it makes us most like the gods (1178b7-23). The more one engages in contemplation, the happier one is (1178b28-32), and if anyone is dear to the gods, it is the wise man (1179a22-24). For these reasons, the life of the intellect is the happiest (1178a7-8).

For Aristotle, contemplation is not the only way to exercise reason, and is therefore not the only kind of happiness. The political life is its own form of happiness, because it too exercises reason for its own sake, though to a lesser degree than contemplation does.[12] It aims at ends that are in a way external to itself insofar as it seeks to secure honor and to preserve the city through provision of material goods and safety from external threats. Acting with moral virtue means performing tasks that we would not choose to perform apart from their being part of just or courageous action; for example, we would never start a war merely to wage war (1177b2-20). Even while arguing that contemplation is happiness, Aristotle acknowledges that virtuous political activity exercises reason. To act implies using reason, so the master craftsman who deliberates about what is to be done to accomplish some yet to be achieved end acts only because he deliberates (*Pol.* 1325b21-23).

12 As Edward Halper argues ("The Rational Basis of Aristotle's Virtue," in *Form and Reason: Essays in Metaphysics* (SUNY Press, 1993), 57-74), for Aristotle moral virtue is rational both because it involves reason, but also because it provides for the exercise of purely intellectual virtue in philosophical contemplation. Aristotle's ethical thinking is therefore neither purely rationalist, but also not merely instrumental to contemplation. My account is consistent with Halper's.

We can see the political life as a life of happiness if we consider the structure of activities in the city that Aristotle lays out at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he does not yet define happiness as a virtuous exercise of reason, but as the highest human good. These two descriptions of happiness, as an exercise of reason and as the highest good, may appear to conflict, but I will show that they do not. I will first analyze what it means for political activity to be the highest good, since doing so will make it clearer why political activity is also by nature an exercise of reason in accordance with virtue.

Aristotle argues in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1 that political knowledge and its practice is the highest end in the city (1094a1-1094b11). The good of any activity or product is its end (1094a2-3), and so political activity is also the highest good. Aristotle outlines a few of the activities that go on in the city and their ends: the doctor's practice of medicine is for the sake of health, shipbuilding is for the sake of the ship, and military activity is for the sake of victory. Ultimately, each of these ends is for one final end, because otherwise there is no value in any of the subordinate activities. What gives anything value is its end, and so if all activities and products are always valuable for some further end, which we always have to refer to some still further end, there is no source of value for any of the subordinate activities. Without one final end to give all activities value, everything is "empty and vain" (1094a20-21).[13] All the ends in the city, whether they are activities or products, are each ultimately for the sake of political activity – not the activity of a part but of the whole as a public body, i.e. the city (1094a27-28).

Aristotle identifies the final end with political activity because political activity rules over all other activities: "Since political science employs the other sciences, and also lays down laws

13 On John Cooper's interpretation (*Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Harvard University Press, 1975), n.93), Aristotle is arguing only for a conditional claim, that life is not vain *on the presupposition that* there is one end, not that there is one such end. As I read him, Aristotle is not asserting a conditional, but arguing that there is a single end.

about what we should do and refrain from, its end will include the ends of the others, and will therefore be the human good" (1094b4-7).[14] For an activity to be the human good is for it to be happiness, as he defines it at 1095a14-20 and 1097b22-23, but why does the fact that political activity rules all other activities make it the end of those activities? Aristotle is asserting an inherent connection between political rule and the ends of all the various activities that take place in the state. There is an indefinite variety in these activities, and they include such different activities as farming, building, playing music, and teaching geometry. Given the diversity of all the activities in a political community, and their difference from office holding, why should we think that the activity of ruling the city is their end? Aristotle seems to be arbitrarily privileging the governing activity of the citizens.

This objection presupposes that ruling is a completely unique kind of activity, but in Aristotle's analysis of activities and their ends, ruling is in a sense suffused throughout the hierarchy of actions. For Aristotle, to have knowledge of the end of some activity or product is to know how that lower activity is to be performed or that product is to be made. For example, because the end of making a flute is playing the flute, and the flute player has the relevant knowledge of how to play the flute, the flute player rules over the flute maker in the sense that the flute player sets the standard for how the flute should be made. Likewise, because sailing the ship is the end of building the ship, the one who knows how to sail (the captain) determines how the ship ought to be built. The same holds for activities as for products: the activity of horse-riding is victory in battle, and the general commands the cavalry. Aristotle thinks of any activity as ruling over the activity whose immediate end it is: "the maker of a house is not the only one

14 Roger Crisp's translation (*Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4). All translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are Crisp's unless otherwise stated.

who has some knowledge about it; the one who uses it is an even better judge (and the one who uses is the household manager). A captain, too, judges a rudder better than a carpenter, and a guest, rather than the cook, a feast" (*Pol.* 1282a20-23).[15] Living in the house is the end of building the house; sailing the ship is the end of building the ship; enjoying a meal is the end of cooking the meal. In each case, the user sets the standard for the product, and in this way knows how the product should be made. By nature, the higher activity is or includes knowledge of the end of the lower activity subordinated to that higher activity, and this knowledge determines the form of the lower end (e.g. the form of the product), though the knowledge of how to put that form into matter belongs to the producer. Aristotle expresses the political implications of the idea that the higher activity rules the lower when he says "For those ruled are like makers of flutes, whereas rulers are like the flute players who use them" (*Pol.* 1277b29-32). Ruling the whole city is of all activities most architectonic, to use Aristotle's term, insofar as it rules over and subordinates all other activities and is not ruled by any other activity. Political activity is set over the highest activities other than itself, including "military science, domestic economy, and rhetoric" (*NE* 1094b3).

What is surprising in this account is not that political rule should know the ends of other activities, but that it should know the ends of all activities, and thus be the one end for all activities.[16] It is the architectonic uniqueness of political activity and knowledge that is, I suggest, more difficult to appreciate, and that distinguishes Aristotle's political thought from a pluralist framework in which the function of government is not thought of as an end in itself, but serves the purpose of providing a sphere in which various communities can pursue their own,

15 C. D. C. Reeve's translation (Hackett, 1998). Unless otherwise stated, I use Reeve's translation throughout.
16 Here I leave aside contemplation, which as I have already pointed out, is also an end in itself. To that extent, political activity is not unique as a final end.

essentially independent ends, within each of which there will be an ordering of subordinate tasks to prior and more fundamental aims. Aristotle sees political rule as the one final end in the city because, as I will explain below, it alone is complete, and completeness is essential to being an end in itself.

According to Aristotle's thought, the activity of ruling is a form of happiness. In accordance with the definition of the good already stated, every end is better than that of which it is the end (*NE* 1094a14-15), and so political activity is the best activity of all and the highest good (with the exception of philosophy, as we will see). Therefore, as the ruling end political activity is a form of happiness. Though Aristotle argues in *Politics* VII.1 that the same thing is best for both an individual and for the whole political community, still, ruling at the level of the city or the state is better than ruling in a smaller community such as a household or village or simply oneself, because the state as a whole is the most significant community. The only complete community is the political community as a public body, and so the happiness of ruling in the state is better than the happiness of ruling any community within the state: "For even if the good is the same for an individual as for a city, that of the city is obviously a greater and more complete thing to obtain and preserve" (1094b7-10).

Aristotle makes a similar argument in the opening chapter of the *Politics*, where he argues that the city is the highest end. The city is a community, and every community has some good as its end, since all action is for the sake of some good. Because the city rules the other communities in it, their ends are really for the city. As Aristotle claims in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1094a14-16), an architectonic science is higher as an end than the sciences it rules over

and so the city's end is the highest end (*Pol.* 1252a1-7). The city's end is itself insofar as its political activity seeks to sustain the city and all the communities in it.

Understanding what it means for political activity to be the highest end that rules over all others in the city is one way to see it as a form of happiness, but what does ruling have to do with exercising reason in accordance with virtue? One might suppose that Aristotle's argument that ruling the city is the highest end allows for the separation of reason and virtue from happiness, contrary to the argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 that happiness is an activity of reason in accordance with virtue. After all, the rulers, good or bad, are by definition those who rule, and so according to Aristotle's reasoning in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1-2 they are engaging in the highest end and are therefore happy. The problem is that the rulers might rule unjustly. The two accounts of happiness, as the highest end in the city and as activity in accordance with virtue, would then be in conflict with each other. Ruling the city would not be inherently connected to reason or virtue.[17] This objection is mistaken. Aristotle's argument that political activity is for its own sake is consistent with his argument that happiness is using reason well. To make this case, I will first show that for Aristotle political activity by its nature is an activity of moral virtue, and once I have done that, I will show that acting with moral virtue is an exercise of reason.[18]

A careful look at the political activity of the citizens will bear out the claim that, when done for its own sake, ruling is an exercise of moral virtue, most importantly of justice.

17 See for example Richard Winfield's criticism of Aristotle that ruling as Aristotle thinks of it has no inherent normative significance, so that Aristotle's invocation of the common good as what distinguishes just from unjust rule is arbitrary (*The Just State* (Humanity Books, 2005), 25-28). If this kind of critique is correct, then Aristotle's accounts of happiness as the highest end and as exercise of reason in accordance with virtue would be inconsistent.
18 See Edward Halper, "The Substance of Aristotle's Ethcis." Halper argues that Aristotle thinks of political activity in metaphysical terms, as analogous to an ἐνέργεια. This metaphysical way of thinking about ethics and politics underlies the workings of the city as Aristotle sees it.

According to Aristotle's definition at *Politics* III.1 (1275b17-21), the citizen is one who rules by holding office in the city. Strictly speaking the city is coextensive with the body of citizens, excluding non-citizens, such as women, slaves, and metics. In a well organized city craftsmen, merchants, and farmers are also excluded from citizenship, since their practices are adverse to virtue as Aristotle understands it (1328b39-1329a2). For Aristotle, none of these excluded groups are capable of ruling well. Aristotle does argue that the masses, who are not citizens strictly speaking, should be allowed to take part in political deliberation and judging, but only as a whole body (1281a39-1282a23). In that way, they will have enough of a share in the governing of the city such that they will be content to live under the authority of the full citizens, but at the same time will not be powerful enough to harm the city through their lack of wisdom. Aristotle therefore gives reasons for making the masses quasi-citizens, but their political role is still limited compared to that of the full citizen.

The ruling activity of the citizens embraces all the activities that take place in the city. There should be officials of marketplace management (ἀγορανομία) for the urban marketplace (1331b9). There must also be an office of town management (ἀστυνομία), which Aristotle describes as supervision of public and private property, preservation of buildings and roads, preservation of the walls and harbors, and all such activities (1321b18-27). There must be offices similar to marketplace management and town management for the countryside (1321b27-30), and military offices (1322a29-1322b6). There must also be auditors to oversee how public money is spent (1322b6-12), priests, heralds, ambassadors (1299a17-20), and corn-rationers (σιτομέτροι, 1299a23). There must even be offices for regulating the conduct of the family in supervision of women and of children (1322b39). When beginning his discussion of education at

the end of *Politics* VII, Aristotle refers to officers who look after the upbringing of young children (the παιδονόμοι, 1336a39-41). He argues that education is to be regulated by the city, since the citizen belongs to the city (1337a27-30), and so there are presumably offices to oversee the city's education. Finally, there must be offices for managing tragic and comic festivals (Διονυσιακούς, 1323a1-2). In addition to the variety of the offices themselves, a citizen may expect to hold different offices at different times, perhaps the same office more than once, depending on the tenure of the office and the number of citizens (1299a34-1299b4). Aristotle does not give us much detail about these many offices, because, he says, reasoning about these matters is not difficult, though it is difficult to bring them about (1331b18-22). The goal of the *Politics* is to lay out the nature and basic structure of the city and to give an account of its end, not to give a blueprint detailing every part of it or necessarily to show how it could be built in fact.

The citizen of Aristotle's city is responsible not only for ruling over the groups excluded from citizenship, but also for other citizens as well. Aristotle envisions the city as being self-ruled in the sense that the citizens rule each other, so that the citizen is both ruler and ruled (*Pol.* 1332b12-29). The citizens must be self-ruling because they are approximately equal to each other in virtue, none having the exclusive right to rule the others, but not all citizens can be rulers at the same time, since then they would not rule each other but would only rule others. The variety of offices already brings about a kind of self-rule, with citizens ruling and being ruled. While one citizen rules over others in military affairs as general, he is ruled in other political spheres, by the judge, the overseer of the market place, and others. Every citizen in any sphere will be ruled over other citizens in other spheres. Aristotle also suggests that the younger

citizens be ruled by the older citizens, so that the same individual citizen will in youth be ruled and in maturity be a ruler alongside fellow mature citizens (1332b35-41), presumably in common deliberation and by alternating between times of office-holding and looking after their own interests (1279a8-13).

The many offices that Aristotle mentions at various points in the *Politics* show that political activity has a wide range, encompassing household, economic, military, and artistic affairs. None of these spheres is in principle exempt from the management of the citizens – there is no sharp distinction between public and private interests or spheres of action, as there is for us today. Nothing in the city lies in principle outside the purview of the political activity of the citizens. Therefore, in a sense the activities lower in the hierarchy of ends, activities performed by those whom the citizens rule, are part of the very governing activity the citizens perform as citizens. The latter activity is complete insofar as it embraces all other activities, depending on nothing that does not fall under its jurisdiction.

It follows from this picture of the state that the citizens could not be citizens without the activities that they govern. If the citizens are to rule for the sake of ruling, they must rule so as to ensure that those whom they rule, both fellow citizens and non-citizens, can continue to engage in the subordinate activities (building ships, soldiering, farming, trading, etc.) whose ultimate end is sustaining the city and its political activity. Insofar as it is for its own sake and not a means to some yet to be obtained goal, the citizens' ruling must aim at its own continuation. Aristotle's metaphysical assumption that political activity is like an ἐνέργεια – an actuality that is for its own sake (*Met.* 1048b18-36) – underlies this view of political rule.[19] If the citizens' rule

19 See Halper's "The Substance of Aristotle's Ethics." Halper argues that Aristotle uses the metaphysical analogy to structure his account of happiness in the individual and in the city.

were to terminate itself by its own activity, it would not be an ἐνέργεια, but a motion, which inherently tends toward its own cessation and is therefore not for its own sake. Because the citizens depend on those whom they rule to carry on the city's economic and military activities, it turns out that the hierarchy of ends outlined at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* entails a dependence of the highest end on the activities that are directly or indirectly for its sake. Rule that is for its own sake cannot undermine itself; in other words, is inherently just.

The point is clear if we consider what the natural results of unjust rule. In whatever way the ruler harms the subject (whether fellow citizen who is subject to the rule of other citizens or non-citizen), such that the subject is less able to perform his or her characteristic activity, the ends that make ruling possible are undone. The subjects are not able to engage in subordinate activities to the extent that the ruler unjustly takes their wealth or imprisons them, and the citizen cannot effectively command soldiers or shipbuilders who have been completely impoverished, for example. Therefore, to the extent that the citizen rules contrary to the interests of those whom he governs, he ruins his own ability to rule and to be a citizen. Unjust rule is not self-sustaining, but undermines itself and tends toward its own destruction, and in that way is not for its own sake. Unjust rule is therefore opposed to political activity and is not really political rule, but domination for some other end. Rule is an inherently normative notion in Aristotle's political thought, because it is for its own sake. We have to think in terms of degrees in this regard, since a city is a large community and can sustain much injustice while still remaining a city with some degree of ruling activity, but the principle still holds. As the Eleatic Visitor says in Plato's *Statesman*, cities by nature hold together firmly, despite the ignorance with which they are run (301e-302b). Aristotle's account of tyranny gives us a clear picture of power exercised not for its

own sake, but for the sake of fulfilling an excessive desire for pleasure or honor. He notes that tyrannies tend to be short-lived (1315b11-39), as they must be given the conflicts internal to the city that naturally arise from the character of the tyrant's rule, among both the subjects and between the tyrant and his subjects.

Along with the prescription against injustice naturally comes the prescription to rule justly. When those performing the lower activities in the city are able to flourish because their particular interests are provided for, the citizens' commands can be carried out most effectively, and their own rule is most secure against internal and external threats. Only thus can ruling be for its own sake, and when it is for its own sake, it aims not only at itself, but at the common good. The city's structure, understood in terms of activities and their ends, the highest end of which is political activity, therefore already contains the necessity for moral virtue. For their own happiness, defined as the highest end, the citizens have to exercise the justice, courage and moderation that sustain the city.

The only thing left to be proven in order to show that political activity is happiness as Aristotle defines it in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 is that acting with moral virtue exercises reason. The two definitions will then be shown to be entirely consistent and mutually supporting. Aristotle defines moral virtue as "a state involving rational choice, consisting in a mean relative to us and determined by reason (λόγῳ) – the reason, that is, by reference to which the practically wise person (φρόνιμος) would determine it" (1106b36-1107a2). All of the moral virtues require seeing what is appropriate in the concrete circumstances we might find ourselves in, circumstances that vary indefinitely from one case to the next. There is no simple formula that correctly prescribes what is always just, courageous, or moderate. Acting in accordance with the

moral virtues of justice, courage, and moderation requires acting with the right feeling, toward the right things and the right people, for the right end, and in the right way (1106b21-23). In the case of moderation, for example, acting moderately, that is, satisfying desires that are beneficial rather than harmful, demands practical judgment about what appetites we should indulge in, to what extent, at what time, and for what end. We therefore need a well developed faculty of deliberation about what is good for ourselves if we are to act well. Aristotle concludes that the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (φρόνησις) is at work in every instance of moral virtue (1144b26-28). He defines practical wisdom as "a true and practical state involving reason, concerned with what is good and bad for a human being" (1140b4-6). Given that practical wisdom is a kind of reason at work in virtuous activity, and that happiness is a life of reason, the political life – the life that exercises the moral virtues most fully – is a happy life. Such a life is for its own sake, even if it is also for the sake of the still higher and better activity of contemplation, as Aristotle argues in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7.

Now, in Aristotle's picture of the ideal state, not every citizen has fully developed moral virtue, since not every citizen has practical wisdom. Only the ruler who holds the city's highest offices has practical wisdom (*Pol.* 1277a14-16).[20] All citizens participate in ruling the city, but some offices are higher than others, and for Aristotle it is only those who hold the highest offices who have practical wisdom. Other citizens will have some lesser form of moral virtue, and Aristotle gives an analysis of some of these lesser forms in the case of courage. Courage properly speaking is facing the possibility of what is most fearful, namely death, in particular

20 Aristotle defines the citizen as someone who "participates" (μετέχειν 1275a23, κοινωνεῖν 1275b18) in ruling the city by holding office. This definition allows for some citizens to hold higher positions within the ruling body than others. Aristotle's claim is that the highest office holders have practical wisdom in the best city, without denying that others participate ruling the city by holding other offices, and so he does not contradict the definition of the citizen generally as someone who participates in ruling.

death in battle for the noblest end, which is the good of the political community (*NE* 1115a24-35). There are also lesser forms of courage, such as the courage of the citizen-soldier who faces danger out of fear of being dishonored in the eyes of the city and who looks forward to honor from the city for enduring danger (1116a15-29), and the courage of the experienced soldier who is not afraid because he knows what to expect in war (1116b3-23). There can be a range of character states that are more or less like complete moral virtue and practical wisdom of the ruler, giving us a range of degrees of happiness depending on how close one comes to real virtue. The important point here is that ruling for its own sake is necessarily an exercise of reason in a way that is sustainable and in accordance with moral virtue. Because sustaining the political community as a ruler is an exercise of the moral virtues, including courage, justice, and moderation, it also is an exercise of reason, and is a form of happiness by the account in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 that happiness is an exercise of reason in accordance with moral virtue.

We can now see clearly that there are two kinds of happiness in Aristotle's thought, both of which he argues for in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, namely the contemplative life and the political life. This dichotomy, between happiness as political activity and happiness as contemplation (or some combination of the two), generates a problem in thinking about the final end of Aristotle's city, as I will show in the next section. There is no other way to exercise reason for its own sake, so anything that can count as happiness will have to be described as at least one of these two forms.

II. Leisure and Philosophy in *Politics* VII.15

We have seen how Aristotle lays out two distinct ends for the citizens of the ideal city, each of which is well-founded in his political and ethical thought, but in the last two books of the

Politics we find what appears to be another kind of end, a philosophy somehow enabled by music. *Politics* VII and VIII form a continuous line of thought centering around the question of what the city's final end is, and how that end is to be achieved. The arguments in VII.1-3, which Aristotle considers to be a "preface" to what follows (1325b33), determine the end at which the material and psychological characteristics of the city described in VII.4-14 aim. In VII.1, Aristotle raises the question of what the best life for the city is (1323a14-21), and argues that it is a life of virtue. He indicates that he is giving an account of the best life again at the beginning of VII.15 (1334a11-14) when he says that humans individually and collectively have the same end. The entire account of the city in *Politics* VII culminates here in Aristotle's account of how leisure is to be spent. Taking up the claim that the city's end is a life of virtue, he now argues that the citizens will need two kinds of virtue, not only those necessary in occupation (ἀσχολία), but also those suitable for leisure (σχολή):

> Since it is evident that human beings have the same end, both individually and collectively, and since the best man and the best constitution must of necessity have the same aim, it is evident that the virtues suitable for leisure should be present in both. For, as has been said repeatedly, peace is the end of war, and leisure of occupation.
>
> ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ τέλος εἶναι φαίνεται καὶ κοινῇ καὶ ἰδίᾳ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ὅρον ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τῷ τε ἀρίστῳ ἀνδρὶ καὶ τῇ ἀρίστῃ πολιτείᾳ, φανερὸν ὅτι δεῖ τὰς εἰς τὴν σχολὴν ἀρετὰς ὑπάρχειν: τέλος γάρ, ὥσπερ εἴρηται πολλάκις, εἰρήνη μὲν πολέμου σχολὴ δ᾽ ἀσχολίας. χρήσιμοι δὲ

> τῶν ἀρετῶν εἰσι πρὸς τὴν σχολὴν καὶ διαγωγὴν ὧν τε ἐν τῇ σχολῇ τὸ ἔργον καὶ ὧν ἐν τῇ ἀσχολίᾳ. (1334a11-18)

The analogy to war and peace shows how occupation and leisure are related. As war is necessary for the sake of peace, occupation is necessary for the sake of leisure. What is the leisure Aristotle has in mind here? One kind of leisure is freedom from manual labor, a leisure that every citizen has by virtue of being a citizen. To take part in political activity, the citizen has to be free from the labor necessary for providing for material needs, since otherwise he cannot develop and exercise virtue (1329a1-2). The political life is the end of labor that is not valuable for its own sake but supplies material goods without knowledge of how to use them. Although this is one kind of leisure, the leisure Aristotle is thinking of in the passage above is not limited to freedom from labor, as he indicates when he tells us what virtues are needed in occupation and leisure: "Courage and endurance are required for work (ἀσχολία), philosophy for leisure, and temperance and justice for both" (1334a22-25). Aristotle here contrasts philosophy with the moral virtues of courage, justice, and moderation by making philosophy exclusive to leisure, while courage, justice, and moderation are exercised in occupation. Because practical wisdom is for the sake of contemplation (*NE* 1145a8-9), justice and moderation, in which practical wisdom is involved, are necessary for leisure, but only insofar as they make philosophy possible. Although political activity is itself a virtuous life of leisure,[21] philosophy is a better use of leisure, and is the proper activity for the citizens when they are not occupied with the affairs of the city. Aristotle reinforces the importance of philosophy at 1334a31-34 when he says that

21 Lord denies that political activity is for its own sake and therefore leisurely (*Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, 40-41, 56). He is right to point out that moral virtue is for the sake of philosophy, but as I argued above, as an exercise of practical wisdom, it is for its own sake too.

those who live in peace and prosperity "will be most in need of philosophy, temperance, and justice the more they live at leisure amidst an abundance of such goods."

What is the philosophy Aristotle has in mind in this chapter? Whatever it is, it constitutes the city's final end, and as we have seen, there are two candidates for the best life, the political life and the contemplative life. The leisure activity in Aristotle's city cannot be merely instrumental to the philosophy practiced by a few citizens, as in Plato's ideal city. It is clear that for Aristotle leisure should be structured around an activity that is better than political activity. As I argued in the previous section, political activity is already not merely instrumental in value insofar as it is for its own sake. Therefore, leisure activity, being a higher end than political activity, cannot be less valuable in itself than political activity.

If philosophy is the final end in a life of leisure, it has to be contemplative, because as Aristotle argues in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7 1177b2-20, contemplation is more of an end in itself than political activity insofar as political activity involves aiming at ends external to itself. Political activity is itself a kind of occupation, and so cannot be what fills the kind of leisure discussed in the passage quoted above. Exercising the moral virtues often involves doing things we would rather not do, except for the fact that they are necessary. For example, no one starts a war simply for the sake of waging war (οὐδεὶς γὰρ αἱρεῖται τὸ πολεμεῖν τοῦ πολεμεῖν ἕνεκα 1177b9-10). Aristotle does not say "war for the sake of courage" but instead "war for the sake of war," since his point here is that we exercise moral virtues in political activity and the moral virtue exercised in war is courage. It would make more sense to think that we ought to wage war for the sake of exercising courage, since happiness is acting with moral virtue and courage is one of the moral virtues. However, according to Aristotle's concept of courage, no one can wage war

only for the sake of exercising courage. Courage in the proper sense is about defending the city from danger, but if we start a war when the city is in no danger, then we are not exercising courage. Courage involves practical wisdom, so it is not just facing danger, but judging correctly when there is danger as well as what dangers should be faced. A "courage" that invites danger where there was none before is not courage, but recklessness and imprudence. The essential point for the nature of leisure is that even though it is a moral virtue whose exercise is happiness, courage is exercised only in circumstances we would rather not face, namely war. Besides the danger to the city that courage depends on, there are all the inconveniences that war entails: the toil of training, keeping watch for long hours, and enduring the elements and loss of sleep. Courage clearly cannot simply be for its own sake, but is for the sake of what is necessary in war, in addition to what is noble. As for justice and moderation, they too are in a way for the sake of something other than themselves. While being necessary for a leisure free from all exertion, they involve some toil (ἡ τοῦ πολιτικοῦ ἄσχολος, 1177b12).

Because maintaining the city by exercising the moral virtue requires exertion, it cannot be continuous, with no time for leisure from public administration. During times of leisure, the citizens must have something worth doing for its own sake, apart from any consideration of need. What the citizens are to do once they have done everything their various offices require? Amusement will not do, because it is for the sake of occupation (1337b35-38). Aristotle's answer is philosophy, which must be contemplative. Any activity suitable for a final end must somehow exercise reason, since happiness is an exercise of reason and contemplation is the only alternative, and the exercise of reason in an activity proper to leisure is superior to political activity because it exercises reason just for its own sake, aiming to do nothing other than reason

well. The proper leisure activity must be some kind of contemplation, since "contemplation alone seems to be liked for its own sake, since nothing results from it apart from the fact that one has contemplated, whereas from the practical virtues, to a greater or lesser extent, we gain something beyond the action" (*NE* 1177b1-4). Aristotle goes so far as to say that in comparison political actions "are not worthy of choice for their own sake" (1177b18). To contemplate is to be like the gods as is possible for a human being (1177b30-1178a1), and in fact the gods have no justice or moderation because they do not need external goods (1178b7-18).

It is not surprising, given Aristotle's account of happiness in *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7-8, that he would make philosophy the final end for the citizen and the city. What makes Aristotle's account of leisure difficult to interpret is that he cannot be taken to mean that the final end is contemplation as he describes it in *Metaphysics* E.1 1026a18-19, as a theoretical knowledge of physics, mathematics, or metaphysics. "Philosophy" has to be meant more broadly in *Politics* VII.15, because Aristotle reasonably supposes that most citizens will not be able to engage in contemplation. He claims in *Politics* VII.14 that moral virtue is for the sake of intellectual virtue, and he divides the soul into two parts, one which is rational in itself, and another which is able to obey reason (1333a16-18). The latter is for the sake of the rational part (1333a22-23).[22] He then divides the rational part into the practical and the theoretical parts (1333a24-25) and in the same way that the part of the soul that is able to obey reason but does not itself think is for the sake of that which is rational in itself, practical reason is for the sake of theoretical reason. But not everyone will be able to reason fully with all the parts of the rational soul. Aristotle claims that "those [actions] that belong to the naturally better part must be more choiceworthy to anyone who can carry out all or only two of them" (1333a27-30). The "two" parts of the soul

22 Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* I.13, 1102a26-1103a3.

and their corresponding activities are the lower two, the part of the soul that can obey reason and the part that reasons about action. In such a person, only the lower rational part, practical reason, is able to act fully. Aristotle therefore implies that not all the citizens will be capable of theoretical reason even in the best city, since some will be capable only of the lower two actions. Of course, we should not take Aristotle to be saying that most of the citizens will not be intellectually capable of understanding some basic mathematics or physics. His point is only that most citizens will not be able to master theoretical disciplines, much less find them pleasant – and pleasure is part of happiness for Aristotle.

The restriction of contemplation to the few citizens who become philosophers puts Aristotle in a difficult position. When he says that the citizens need philosophy for leisure, he means that all the citizens need philosophy, as is indicated by the fact that the education he outlines in *Politics* VIII is meant to prepare the citizens for a final end (1334b5), and education is for all the citizens (1337a21-26). All the citizens must be educated well because the end of the city is happiness, and the city just is all of the citizens in their many governing roles. A comparison with how Socrates views the happiness of the ideal city in the *Republic* highlights the nature of the problem. Socrates claims that his goal in laying out the structure of the ideal city is to make the whole city happy, not necessarily its parts (*Republic* 419a ff.). Just as a sculptor ought to make the statue beautiful as a whole, rather than seeking first of all to make any particular part beautiful, there is no demand to make any one of its three classes happy. Socrates' goal is to show how all the parts can be made to work together. Aristotle argues contrary to Plato's account of the best city that the happiness of the whole city is not independent of the happiness of its parts: "it is impossible for the whole to be happy unless *all, most, or some* of its

parts are happy. For happiness is not made up of the same things as evenness, since the latter can be present in the whole without being present in either of the parts, whereas happiness cannot" (my emphasis, *Pol.* 1264b17-22). Some wholes can have properties that none of their parts do, for example a number, which can be even, although its parts are not even, as the number six is even despite the fact that the two threes of which it is composed are both odd. The city's happiness is not like the evenness of a number insofar as some parts of the city (namely the citizens) must be happy if the city is to be happy as a whole. Because the success of Aristotle's city is ensuring the happiness of all the citizens, rather than providing a place for a few philosopher-kings to contemplate forms, he has to find an activity in which all of the citizens can in principle be happy. If only a few citizens are able to engage in an activity that is for its own sake without qualification, the city is not happy.[23]

III. Scholarship on Leisure

Scholars who try to interpret the value of leisure and the place of music in it fall into two groups. One group, represented by Carnes Lord, sees leisure as a place for continuing moral education not for children but for adult citizens, while the other group of scholars, of whom I will offer a recent work by Mor Segev, suggests that music by nature leads the citizens directly to theoretical science of the kind contained in Aristotle's philosophical and scientific works. A common assumption shared by both groups seem to be that if the proper leisure exercises reason

23 In his commentary, Richard Kraut (Politics: *Books VII and VIII* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 60-61) suggests that Aristotle fails to consider notions of happiness on which the happiness of the city could be distinct from the happiness of the individual citizens, particularly the notion that happiness is possessing wealth. In that case, the city as a public body could have an empty treasury, while the citizens are each rich, or the city as a public institution could have great wealth while each of the citizens is impoverished. Aristotle does not raise this kind of possibility because his concept of the city is simply all the citizens taken together, not a public institution as opposed to the private individuals. The citizens will have their own property, as Aristotle argues in *Politics* II, but it is a misleading representation of Aristotle's though to talk of the city's wealth in strong opposition to the wealth of the citizens for the Greeks.

for its own sake, it must be scientific. The first group reasons that average citizens cannot become philosophers in the full sense, so music must not be theoretical or contemplative. The other reasons that contemplation is the highest end of Aristotle's city and is genuine happiness, so music must at least point every citizen toward philosophy in the strict sense of metaphysics. Neither of the two groups considers whether music could generate a contemplative activity of a lower sort than full theoretical science, so that leisure could be about using reason for its own sake without itself being or leading immediately toward philosophy in the full sense. I will analyze Lord's interpretation first, then consider Segev's, and offer my own as an alternative that avoids the problems of each.

In *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, Carnes Lord argues that for Aristotle the citizens need to spend their leisure viewing tragedy as a way to "moderate the claims of politics."[24] According to Lord's interpretation, the problem Aristotle is trying to deal with in his account of leisure is due to the citizens' spirit (θυμός). Aristotle's city needs a well developed spirit, since spirit motivates the citizens to rule and to be free from domination by other cities (*Pol.* 1327b23-33), and without freedom the citizens cannot exercise virtue or be happy. But spirit, being the same drive both for one's own freedom and for ruling over others, is always in danger of becoming the drive to dominate other citizens and other cities: "Spiritedness is indispensable for the best city just as it is an inescapable fact of political life as such; but it represents at the same time a grave danger, as it constantly threatens the predominance in politics of prudence or reason."[25] Political rule is necessarily unstable and naturally becomes unjust hegemony of one city over others as a result of the citizens' excessive spirit, and so without a

24 Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, 34-35.
25 Ibid., 164.

moderating influence "political rule as exercised by the city is an impossible halfway house on the road to despotic rule or 'mastery'."[26] Tragedy is the solution to the danger that spirit presents to the city because it lets the citizens see the effects of excessive spirit, warning them against letting their spirit become excessive and providing an outlet to the potentially harmful emotions associated with spirit. The catharsis that results from viewing tragedy moderates spirit insofar as it cleanses the soul of excessive fear, pity, anger, and other such potentially dangerous emotions, all of which Lord associates with spirit.

Lord is partly inspired by Friedrich Solmsen. Solmsen's goal is to show that Aristotle articulates a view of leisure that captures the increasing value it had for his contemporaries, a value that was not present for example in Plato's account.[27] To explain the seriousness, as opposed to play or amusement, that Aristotle argues should be present in leisure, Solmsen interprets leisure as moral education in a way that anticipates to some extent Lord's interpretation.[28] He associates leisure with music, and argues that for Aristotle music produces happiness insofar as it gives the citizens "the right ethical disposition."[29] Solmsen takes Aristotle's recognition that most citizens cannot find happiness in philosophy to show that the leisure activity of the citizen body as a whole cannot be in itself philosophical.[30]

The most basic problem with this kind of argument is that it does not account for how leisure for the citizens in general is an end in itself, as Aristotle argues in *Politics* VII.15 and VIII.3-5 even though Solmsen and Lord admit that Aristotle envisions such a leisure for all the citizens, including those who are not philosophers. According to Lord, the adult citizens need an

26 Ibid., 190-191.
27 Friedrich Solmsen, "Leisure and Play in Aristotle's Ideal State," in *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* (Frankfurt am Main: 1964), 193-220.
28 Ibid., 213-215.
29 Ibid., 216.
30 Ibid., 217-218.

ongoing moral education for the sake of political stability. Taking leisure to be for the sake of moral education of adults, he makes music and leisure be only instrumentally valuable for using reason well in political activity, and perhaps the philosophy of those few citizens who are capable of it, in such a way that leisure activity is not for its own sake. Music cannot generate an inherently rational activity in the citizens, because the moral education it serves is the formation of good habits of feeling in the citizens. Habituation of feeling is not an intellectual practice, but rather precedes practical wisdom (*NE* 1140b17-20). If music is only for educating the character of the citizens by habituating them to feel the right kinds of pleasures and pains, and is not involved with a use of reason in its own right, it cannot be inherently valuable. Therefore, Lord does not show how music can provide for a leisure worthy of being a final end, as Aristotle argues it should. While Lord is right I believe to distinguish the Greek view of music from modern views, and to argue that Aristotle is not indifferent to the influence of music and leisure on the citizens' character,[31] his interpretation fails to fit with Aristotle's notion of what is inherently valuable, and Aristotle's text itself.

A related problem with Lord's argument is his misunderstanding of Aristotle's view of political activity. He supposes that for Aristotle it is inherently unstable, leading naturally to unjust domination. This misperception motivates his interpretation of leisure as a place for moral education of adults, but, as I argued above, political activity as Aristotle understands it is inherently stable. The only thing that makes politics unstable is vice, but to act with vice is to work against the very nature of political activity. Lord emphasizes how Aristotle highlights the moral benefit of making philosophy the final end of the city in *Politics* VII.15. Aristotle observes that leisure tends to threaten the moderation and justice of the citizens, most of whom

31 See Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, 17-35.

are not perfectly virtuous to begin with, since all but the ruler lack genuine practical wisdom. Moderation and justice are therefore even more necessary in leisure than in war (1334a25-28), because war demands that the citizens act with some degree of moderation and justice. The citizens are responsible for defending the city, and war requires the use of material goods as well as the time taken up by military service, so during war the citizens have little opportunity to act immoderately or unjustly. The fear of the consequences of defeat acts as a restraint on the potential vice of the citizens to the extent that injustice undermines the integrity of the city as a whole. When that restraint is removed there is a danger that the citizen will become "arrogant" (ὕβριστος). It follows that war is paradoxically good for the city. The abundance of wealth and time free from necessary occupations during a period of peace and leisure make it more difficult to be moderate and just. Therefore, people who live in ease and prosperity, like those who live in the mythological Isles of the Blessed, need moderation and justice even more than people who are at war. But Aristotle points out that they also need a proper leisure activity that exercises a better virtue than moral virtue, in other words, philosophy (1334a24-36). Instead of limiting leisure to moral benefit, as Lord does, we should think of the moral benefit of philosophy as a secondary, though natural, effect of making the exercise of reason the highest end. For Aristotle, it is not that philosophy is valuable only for ensuring that the citizens remain virtuous. His claim is rather that the lower end of exercising moral virtue is itself not secure without a higher end. Aristotle's point is not unlike Socrates' suggestion in the *Republic*, that the rulers need a better activity than ruling the city if they are to rule justly (520e-521a), though he spells out what that means in a different way.

The other kind of interpretation in the literature makes the city's leisure activity not moral education, but instead something like an early stage of scientific and even metaphysical inquiry. In *Aristotle on Religion*, Mor Segev articulates a position of this kind.[32] He gives an account of the function of traditional religion in Aristotle's best city, rather than of music *per se*, but his account can be understood as an interpretation of the value of music for leisure, since myths about gods and heroes are a major feature of Greek music, including tragedy.

Segev's interpretation is motivated by the necessity of religion in Aristotle's city.[33] Aristotle claims that religion (*Politics* 1328b11-13) and priests (1329a27-34) are necessary elements of the best city. He describes how buildings dedicated to the worship of the gods should be arranged in *Politics* VII.12 (1331a26-30). By all appearances, Aristotle includes the practice of Greek religion in the best city, without radically reforming it as Plato does in the *Republic*. These features of the city are surprising, Segev argues, because Aristotle rejects the anthropomorphism and providential agency of the gods as they are represented in myth.[34] The gods as Aristotle describes them in *Metaphysics* Λ.7-10 have no concern for and very little in common with humans. For Aristotle, the gods are unmoved movers which are without bodies and do not change, and the eternally moving heavenly spheres. The latter have bodies, but the only other thing they share with humans is the capacity for intellect – the heavenly spheres are not in any kind of political community and do not deliberate, in contrast to humans. Why then is Greek religion a necessary part of the city?

32 Mor Segev, *Aristotle on Religion*, (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
33 Ibid., 49-50.
34 See Richard Bodéüs *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. Jan Edward Garrett (SUNY Press, 2000) for the contrary view that Aristotle accepted the athropomorphism and providence of the traditional Greek gods.

Segev argues that Greek religion has value for the city despite its falsity because it motivates the citizens to look into the true nature of the gods by inspiring wonder about the gods as they are presented in myth.[35] Religion prepares the way for metaphysics, and in this way allows the city to achieve its final end of philosophical contemplation. To make his case, Segev refers to *Metaphysics* A.2 where Aristotle argues that the cause of inquiry into the first principles of everything is wonder. Myths are full of wonders (*Met.* 982b19), and the lover of myths (φιλόμυθος) is like the lover of wisdom (φιλόσοφος) (982b18-19). People first wondered about what is near at hand, but eventually inquired into the origins of the world (982b12-17), so for Aristotle the wonder generated by Greek religion leads gradually to knowledge of the gods as they really are, that is, unmoved movers and the first principles of the cosmos. Even though the content of religion is false, religion still accomplishes its end and contributes to the city because it only needs to inspire wonder, not give a true picture of the gods. Segev notes Aristotle's claim in the *Rhetoric* (1371b12-15) that we enjoy what is akin to us, and the gods of myth are like us,[36] so according to Segev the anthropomorphism of myth turns out to be a positive benefit to the extent that enjoyment contributes to wonder.

According to Segev, as I understand his argument, while wonder is the psychological motivation for inquiring into the true nature of the gods, the logical motivation to turn to metaphysics is supposed to occur in the citizen's mind by way of an analogy. The gods as presented in myth are evidently like us insofar as they deliberate and act, and live in a kind of political community, while they are nonetheless superior to humans by their immortality. The primary difference between humans and the gods in myth is obvious enough, i.e. that the gods

35 Segev, *Aristotle on Religion*, 62-65.
36 Ibid., 63-64.

are immortal while humans are mortal, but myth raises the question in the citizen's mind of what accounts for our similarity to the gods, and the answer that the citizen should come to is that the gods exercise practical reason.[37] The citizens ought to arrive at self-knowledge through friendship with other citizens, and because what it means to be human is not to exercise practical reason, but intellect (νοῦς), the citizens should realize that what really makes the gods divine and superior to humans is their intellect, which is perfect.[38] The true Aristotelian gods are intellects, and myth ultimately suggests to the citizens that it is as self-sufficient intellects that the gods are superior to humans. So, in realizing that the gods are better than they are presented in myth the citizens will naturally be motivated to think about the gods philosophically.

Although I believe Segev is right to look to the role of wonder in Aristotle's thought (and I should be clear that Segev's emphasis on wonder is an inspiration for my own interpretation), it is not clear whether wonder about the gods could motivate the citizens to pursue philosophical knowledge as Segev envisions, nor what value myth has for the majority of citizens who are not capable of making progress in metaphysical thought. Myth, as Segev himself recognizes,[39] is not about raising questions that we are compelled to answer, but about giving answers. Hesiod tells us in his *Theogony* about the origin of the cosmos: first was Chaos, then came Gaia, followed by Tartarus and Eros (116-120). The other gods follow from these in a series of generations through the familiar process of reproduction. This is not a philosophically satisfying account, and it is not clear why the citizen who is not a philosopher would feel the need to look for philosophical knowledge about the true first principles of the cosmos rather than be satisfied with the myth. The wonder such a myth produces is amazement at what the myth tells us about the history of the

37 Ibid., 108.
38 Ibid., 123.
39 Ibid., 64.

cosmos, but we seem to lose that very wonder when we recognize that the myth is philosophically inadequate. Moreover, if we are motivated by wonder at myth, why would the citizens not turn to more sophisticated mythology rather than philosophy? The proposed shift in a mythological mode of thought to a philosophical mode is unaccounted for. As for the analogy Segev proposes, it is not clear why the citizen would see the common feature shared by humans and the gods as intellect rather than practical reason. Aristotle notes the objection against the claim that the contemplative life is best is that the contemplative life "does nothing" (*Pol.* 1325a21-22). While in fact for Aristotle the contemplative life is more active, it is difficult to see how the highest exercise of intellect in metaphysics would appeal to most citizens to whom it is likely to appear to be inactive, and therefore not typical of human nature. Segev's argument however depends on the citizens seeing themselves as similar to the gods on the basis of intellect. Therefore, there is good reason to doubt that Segev's proposed mechanism by which the citizen transitions from thinking in terms of traditional religion to philosophical contemplation would work.

Other scholars propose that leisure is a time for citizens to engage in philosophy or as a preparation for philosophy. John Burnet suggests that Aristotle's complete account of education in *Politics* VIII must have led to metaphysics, since for Aristotle "the only justification for the state's existence" is science.[40] Burnet thinks that science would have been part of every citizen's education and presumably would have filled all citizens' leisure time. Another scholar who falls into the same group is David Depew, who recognizes that leisure in Aristotle's city is an intellectual activity, and that moral education cannot be the highest use of music. He suggests that the focus of leisure is tragedy, whose function is to "clarify" the citizens' capacity for moral

40 John Burnet, *Aristotle on Education* (1903; Cambridge University Press, 1967), 134-136.

deliberation; tragedy in his view "sharpens and exercises practical judgment" through catharsis.[41] Depew rightly emphasizes that leisure is not about moral education, but an activity that is in itself rational or cognitive.[42] He suggests that tragedy mediates the citizens' ascent to philosophical contemplation by exercising their practical wisdom and highlighting the status of humans as noble, but lower than the gods.[43] Segev's interpretation is similar to Depew's in this respect. Though Depew's interpretation of music is suggestive and points in the right direction, it is difficult to see how tragedy performs the function he ascribes to it. It might exercise something like practical wisdom in the citizens as Depew suggests, it is not clear how exercising practical reason would tend toward the exercise of contemplative wisdom.

A problem that remains for interpretations like Segev's and Depew's, which see leisure activity as intellectual and musical, a problem I myself will have to deal with, is that the effect of tragedy seems to be primarily emotional, not intellectual, according to Aristotle's account in the *Poetics*. So far, there is no clear way in which we can understand tragedy to be philosophical. So although Depew and Segev inspire my own interpretation to a degree, there is still work to be done in order to make the connection between viewing tragedy and contemplation clear, and to explain what kind of contemplation Aristotle expects to occur in musical leisure.

My interpretation will also incorporate the notion of wonder, but I will define wonder differently than Segev understands it, in a way that is closer to how Aristotle understands wonder. In *Metaphysics* A.2, wonder is a result of an intellectual problem or impasse (ἀπορία). Aristotle's examples of impasses in this chapter are wondering how an artificial product could

41 Depew associates his view of tragedy and catharsis with Nussbaum, who argues that catharsis is about cognitive clarification (*The Fragility of Goodness*, 388-391) and Richard Janko (*Aristotle's Poetics* (Hackett, 1987), xviii-xix), along with others.
42 Depew, "Politics, Music, and Contemplation in Aristotle's Ideal State," n.20.
43 Ibid., 370. Segev's view is influenced by Depew's in this respect. Segev also picks up on Depew's suggestion that wonder plays an important role ("Politics, Music, and Contemplation in Aristotle's Ideal State," 370).

move itself, how the sun could reverse its movement across the sky at the summer and winter solstices, and how the hypotenuse of a right triangle could be incommensurable with its other two sides (*Met.* 983a12-17).[44] In each of these cases, there is an apparent impossibility given presuppositions about the natures of the artifact, the sun, and the triangle. Awareness of the impossibility gives us a sense of wonder, motivating us to look for the cause. The wonder in *Metaphysics* A.2 is therefore a beginning of an inquiry, but with a very specific goal of reaching knowledge about nature. Wonder therefore has a definite rational component. I will argue that tragedy arouses a sense of wonder of this kind in the citizens.

IV. Education and Music

In order to determine what kind of philosophy could be a final end for the whole city, I suggest that we look closely at Aristotle's account of education at the end of *Politics* VII and in book VIII, because education prepares the citizens for the activity that will occupy their leisure. Aristotle's account of education culminates in music, which was originally introduced into education, he says, because "nature itself aims not only at the correct use of work (ἀσχολεῖν) but also at the capacity for noble leisured activity" (1337b29-32). Music is valuable because it makes it possible for the citizens to use their leisure well. As an illustration he cites Odysseus's lines from *Odyssey* IX.7-8, that the best leisured pursuit (διαγωγή) is attending the recitation of a poet, when "the banqueters seated in due order throughout the hall, give ear to the bard" (1338a27-30).

The purpose of Aristotle's account of education is to show how the citizens can best be prepared for living well. After briefly touching on the role of philosophy in leisure in VII.15, he

44 Segev supposes that the wonder myth inspires is compatible with the fact that myths often explain phenomena in nature (*Aristotle on Religion*, 64), verifying that he does not recognize the wonder Aristotle discusses in *Metaphysics* A.2 as due to an impasse.

says: “We must now study how and through what means this will come about” (1334b5). The Greek at 1334b4 is corrupt, so what the “this” refers to grammatically is not entirely certain, but from the sense of the passage it is clear that Aristotle means virtue, or the enjoyment (ἀπόλαυσις) of virtue (i.e. happiness), which he mentions at 1334b3. Aristotle’s reasoning is that education enables the citizen to acquire and exercise the virtues (1337a18-21) and therefore to be happy. Because education enables the citizens to be happy, and the city’s end is the happiness of the citizens, the education of all citizens should be supervised by the city (1337a21-26). Because education is a civic matter, Aristotle must give us an outline of the proper program of education if he is to give a full account of the ideal city. Furthermore, Aristotle has just told us in *Politics* VII.15 that the city’s final end is philosophy, so the city’s education should prepare them to engage in that philosophy. The main subject of *Politics* VIII is the city’s education, so we can expect to find there further material for understanding what philosophy is. Of course, not all of education is immediately relevant to the happiness of the adult citizens. Habituation for the moral virtues is preparation for the exercise of reason, but does not provide training in any kind of contemplation, since moral reasoning is not philosophy. Nonetheless, the city’s education still has to ensure that the citizens are happy. The entire point of establishing a civic education and the end of the city itself would be defeated if it did not include some kind of preparation for the activity that is their final end.

The first time Aristotle mentions music is in a list of the four customary parts of education, along with reading and writing (taken together as one – γράμματα), gymnastic, and drawing (1337b23-25). Aristotle shows no intention of radically revising the traditional Greek branches of education, as Plato does in the *Republic*, so we can take this list to be exhaustive for

the civil education that all citizens participate in. Aristotle does not exclude theoretical practices from the city, and he may very well have gone on in the missing part of book VIII to discuss theoretical education, but such education would not have been for the citizens in general.

Right away, music stands out from the other parts of education. Reading and writing are valued in education because they are thought of as useful for practical purposes, while gymnastic is valued because it tends to promote courage (1337b25-27). There is no difficulty in seeing why these are included as parts of the city's education, but the value of music is not so clear. Aristotle asks whether music is for pleasure and amusement, for instilling moral virtue, or for enabling citizens to perform a higher intellectual activity (1339a14-26). He finds all of these ends as plausible candidates for the purpose of music, and in fact he argues that music is for all three, at different times and for different audiences. He even admits that mere amusement is sometimes a legitimate use for music (1342a1-2). The city's craftsmen and "others of that sort," whose lives consist in manual labor rather than the citizen's leisure, need music for relaxation (1342a18-22), and music has the capacity to contribute to education in moral virtue (1340a12-1340b19).

Although the ends of providing pleasure and of helping to inculcate the young with moral virtue are appropriate uses for music at the right time, Aristotle's claim at 1337b29-32 that nature aims at the capacity for noble leisure suggests that music is also for the highest end in the city. He has not forgotten the issue he raised in *Politics* VII.15. What, he asks, are we going to do with our leisure once we are no longer occupied with necessary work (1337b34-35)? He argues for the traditional view of music, according to which music is valuable for leisure, because it gives an adequate answer to the vitally important question of how leisure is to be spent if the citizens are to be happy. One answer that will not work is that leisure is only for amusement

(ἀνάπαυσις) or play (παιδία), because amusement is not an end in itself. By providing rest, amusement is for the sake of labor and occupation, while labor and occupation are for the sake of leisure (1337b35-1338a1, *NE* 1176b27-1177a1). Therefore, to make amusement the end of labor is to reverse the natural ordering of ends between occupation and amusement, so that genuine leisure is left out of the picture completely. It is irrational and contrary to happiness to live for the sake of amusement, at any rate for the educated citizen who is capable of engaging in a higher end. To be human is to have the capacity to reason, and so being fully human means using reason only for its own sake, and philosophy is the achievement of that end. Therefore, music's value as a means to generating moral virtue in the young citizens does not encompass the value it has for contributing to the citizens' final end. Although much of the account of education Aristotle lays out in *Politics* VIII is for the habituation of the irrational part of the soul, such education is preliminary to the education of reason, and so cannot itself be the final end. Human nature (1337b30) demands that we have a higher activity that goes beyond what education in the useful or the necessary provides. The political life, which is one kind of leisure, also fails to be the proper activity for leisure because it involves aiming at external ends, as I argued earlier. Leisure spent in philosophy is neither useful nor necessary, not because it is not good, but because it is the best. It is "useless" or "unnecessary," because everything else is useful or necessary for it. In Aristotle's account, music appears to be the object of this philosophy, given that music has a more direct relation to leisure over and above the role it plays in moral education. Aristotle's quotation from the *Odyssey* in which we see an audience listening to someone producing music suggests this as well.

A strong textual connection between the passage in VII.15 on the importance of leisure and Aristotle's account of the purpose of music in VIII.3 reinforces my claim that the leisure of the majority of citizens and their highest end is to be spent with music. In VIII.3, Aristotle asserts that music had been included in education in the past because nature aims at using leisure well, and that leisure is the first principle of everything (αὕτη [σχολή] γὰρ ἀρχὴ πάντων μία, 1337b32). The only reasonable way to take the first principle here is as a final cause, the end at which the citizen aims, since it is the first principle of "everything," i.e. of all human action. Aristotle ties together leisure and happiness in VIII.3, just as he had earlier in VII.15. In VIII.3, he says that leisure itself contains (ἔχειν) "pleasure, happiness, and living blessedly" (τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν καὶ τὸ ζῆν μακαρίως, 1338a1-3). Because leisure has within it happiness and blessedness, it contains the citizen's highest end, just as in VII.15. The concept of leisure in these two passages is the same, and so given that the proper leisure activity is philosophy as Aristotle argues in VII.15, and that music plays an essential role in leisure, philosophy must have a close connection to music.

Aristotle claims that music contributes to "διαγωγή and φρόνησις" (1339a25-26). According to the LSJ, διαγωγή means "passing time" or "way of life," and so can refer to a range of activities, good and bad.[45] Just as one can spend one's time in more or less serious pursuits, διαγωγή can be spending time in mere amusement or in using reason for its own sake in some way, but it is clear that in this passage Aristotle has in mind the latter, better way of spending time. Aristotle associates διαγωγή and leisure closely at 1338a9-11 and 1338a13-22, and so when he says that music contributes to διαγωγή, the term is almost synonymous with the kind of leisure that the citizens of the best city spend in an activity that is an end in itself.

45 See Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, 56-57; 78-85 for a discussion of διαγωγή.

What does it means for music to contribute to φρόνησις, and why does Aristotle link it to διαγωγή? Φρόνησις is of course often a technical term meaning "practical wisdom," the intellectual virtue that is at work in all the moral virtues, by which one deliberates about how to act. Aristotle is careful to define precisely what this virtue is in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI. He may very well have the technical sense of the term in mind here, but even if he does, in saying that music contributes to practical wisdom he cannot mean that the greatest value of music is that it helps us to develop moral character. Developing good character in youth enables the citizens to acquire practical wisdom as adults, since practical wisdom works in the moral virtues.[46] But this is not Aristotle's point, because he is not addressing the role music plays in education in moral virtue, he is explaining how music contributes to a final end. Aristotle might instead mean that music contributes to practical wisdom because it gives the citizens the opportunity to exercise their deliberative faculties, not in order to become virtuous, but simply to reason as an end in itself. In that case, music would generate an activity that is an end in itself in a way similar to how political activity is an end in itself, but without requiring the citizens to act and therefore lacking the toil associated with politics. The idea might be that watching a tragedy, which is an imitation of one action (*Poetics* 1451a30-32), would give the viewer the opportunity to deliberate in a fashion by thinking through the action of the tragic hero. On the other hand, Aristotle might not have in mind the technical sense of φρόνησις. He could have in mind a more contemplative virtue akin to that exercised in the theoretical dimension of his ethical and political thought, e.g. the nature of happiness (*NE* I.7), the nature of action and deliberation (VI.2, 5, 8-9), the definitions of the virtues (III-V), and the structure and ends of the city (I.1-2, *Pol*. I.1-2, III.1-6, VII-VIII). I will argue that tragedy has the function of generating a kind of

46 See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a4-11 and 1140b16-20.

thinking of this sort: not theoretical to the degree that metaphysics is, but nonetheless aiming at knowledge worth possessing for its own sake, while also being of practical benefit.

Whatever exactly Aristotle has in mind, φρόνησις is an intellectual virtue, so by saying that music contributes to φρόνησις, he indicates that music is for the sake of enabling the citizens to reason well. By arguing that the citizens are to be educated in music so that they can enjoy leisure, Aristotle implies that music contributes to philosophy, but he does not mean to say that leisure should be spent in performing music. It would make little sense to claim that performing music is philosophy, since performance is a productive art while philosophy is contemplative. The citizens should not become professional musicians themselves, since professional performance tends to aim at the vulgar pleasure of the audience, and thereby to vulgarize the performer (1341b8-18). Aristotle thinks of professional musicians as of a lower class than the citizens: "we even say that musicians are vulgar craftsmen (βαναύσοι), and that a true man would not perform music unless he were drunk or amusing himself" (1339b8-10). Like those who argue that citizens ought not learn to perform at all, Aristotle believes that high technical skill tends to make the body useless for the activities of a citizen (1341a5-9). Nonetheless, he argues that the citizens should learn to play a musical instrument (1340b20-39). His justification for having the young learn to perform is not so that they will be able to find pleasure in music, as if pleasure alone were the purpose of music, but so that they acquire the ability to judge music well later in life. Once they have become adults, the citizens must "be able to judge (κρίνειν) which melodies are noble (τὰ καλὰ) and enjoy them in the right way, because of what they learned while they were young" (1340b38-39). Learning to perform in youth is necessary for judging well because "it is difficult if not impossible for people to become excellent judges of

performance if they do not take part in it" (1340b22-23). The music education of the young therefore aims at preparing the young to perform in adulthood an activity inherently connected to music: to make judgments about it.

The judgment the citizens will exercise as adults cannot be restricted to those produced by moral education, though music might help to reinforce the right pleasures in pains in the citizens at the same time that it enables them to exercise another kind of judgment. The judgment formed during music education seems to have an aesthetic dimension. The extent to which the young ought to learn to perform is limited by the capacity they acquire not only to judge but also "to enjoy (χαίρειν) noble melodies and rhythms" (1341a14). The purpose of music education is that as adults the citizens take pleasure in music, over and above teaching them to distinguish between virtue and vice. The pleasure they should learn to enjoy is not a pleasure shared with non-human animals, slaves, and children (1341a15-17), but a more refined pleasure in what is noble. Clearly, a perception of some kind is involved, not a perception given immediately by sensation, nor one easily acquired by any human, but one that requires training to appreciate. The thought appears to be that learning to play music increases one's ability to perceive beauty in good music, a likely consequence of the close attention to music that learning to play it requires. Unlike moral judgment, perception of beauty could conceivably be simply for its own sake, consistent with the ultimate purpose of music education, i.e. to enable the citizens to engage in an activity that is a final end.

V. The Problem

We can now see that for Aristotle music contributes to philosophy as performance, and not only by providing citizens with the moral virtue necessary for philosophy as a factor external

to philosophy itself, but as an object of philosophy, tragedy being the most important form. However, the idea that music of any kind could bring about anything that could be called philosophy conflicts with how we usually think of music and philosophy. Music is usually thought of as a matter of emotion or feeling (πάθος), while philosophy is about reason. Aristotle himself seems to suppose that the nature of music is to affect the emotions rather than to provoke philosophical thought. Music instills a habit of feeling in the soul, with profound effects on the soul's ethical development insofar as it causes the soul to take pleasure not only in the imitation, but in the kind of character and action that the music imitates: "getting into the habit of being pained or pleased by likenesses is close to being in the same condition where the real things are concerned" (1340a23-25). Its ethical effect is due to the habit of feeling it gives to the soul. For Aristotle, music imitates emotion, and whoever listens to music "comes to have the corresponding emotions" (ἔτι δὲ ἀκροώμενοι τῶν μιμήσεων γίγνονται πάντες συμπαθεῖς, 1340a12-13).[47] Since part of what defines music is its imitative quality (*Poetics* 1447a13-16), Aristotle's claim seems to suggest that its effect on the listener or viewer could only be emotional. In that case, where does thinking come into play? Although music includes language, giving some parts of music a potential claim to being an object of discursive reason, it is hard to see how tragedy or poetry aim to teach anything or make an argument. That some philosophers, like Parmenides and Empedocles, put their philosophical doctrines into verse makes no difference, because poetry in the proper sense is not defined only in terms of its form, but also its content: it must be an imitation of something, as well as having verse (1447b17-23). Purely instrumental music seems even less suitable for generating a rational activity than poetry.

47 Aristotle argues from the effects of music that we see, to its ontological status as an imitation, identifying it as the cause of how music affects the soul as it does: we know music is an imitation because it affects the soul (1340a22-23), making the soul like what it imitates.

Of course, one can reason about the nature of some part of music, as Aristotle does in the *Poetics*, or of music in general, as Plato does in the *Ion*, but these analyses are scientific and so not the right material for the leisure of *Politics* VII.15. As I have already shown, the kind of thinking that constitutes the citizens' leisure is not theoretical or scientific, so this form of reasoning about music cannot be what Aristotle has in mind for leisure.

The way in which Plato discusses music reinforces the separation between music and philosophy. In the *Republic*, the only legitimate function of music is to educate the young in courage and moderation, and it does this by habituating them to feel certain pleasures and pains. Socrates argues in books II-III that Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and the rest of the Greek poets should be excluded from the city entirely, since their music promotes cowardice and immoderation in the citizens, and he argues in book X that by its nature poetry is no more than an imitation twice-removed from what is real (597e). Music's power to affect the soul is due to its imitation of good or bad character and action, along with our tendency to take pleasure in the imitation (*Republic* 394d-395e, 398c-400e, 605c-d).[48] In the *Laws*, the Athenian stranger argues in book II that all citizens should take part in performing music, with different age groups performing different sorts of music (664c-d). Again, as in the *Republic*, the purpose of music to encourage the citizens to be virtuous by producing the right kind of pleasures in them. The adult citizens perform music as a kind of ongoing education, an extension of what the young receive, in order to continually reinforce the habit they have of acting well. These citizens are not philosophers and therefore not truly virtuous, so they need constant education of their feelings throughout their lives. So for Plato, music is not an object of reason exercised for its sake, but is

48 At *Republic* 394d-395e the sense of "imitation" is limited specifically to what we can call third-person narration, but as the following passages show clearly, music in general is imitation as well.

at best part of education in the moral virtues. It has no value for leisure or philosophy, except as a means to pacify those whom the philosophers rule in the ideal city. Though Aristotle finds more value in music than Plato ascribes to it in the *Republic*, it is not obvious that he thinks of music as contributing directly to philosophy. With Plato's account of music in the background, we would expect Aristotle to explicitly argue that music contributes to philosophy if he thought it had the capacity to do so, but he gives no explicit, clear argument that it does in the texts we have.

To deal with the problem, I suggest that we consider Greek drama, particularly tragedy, as the paradigmatic form of music that Aristotle has in mind for philosophy. Tragedy incorporates harmony and poetry, making tragedy more complete than either of them taken separately. Being the best form, it is most likely to exercise the best part of the soul, namely the part that reasons by itself. Aristotle also analyzes tragedy in terms of form and matter. The story (ψυχή) (or plot) is the soul and therefore the form of the tragedy that unites the six parts which are the matter of the tragedy (*Poetics* 1450a38-39). Form is inherently intelligible, so in the very nature of tragedy we find what could be the object of the viewer's contemplation.

There is some textual support in the *Politics* that in Aristotle's mind tragedy has value for leisure. We should take note of Aristotle's mention of catharsis at 1342b38-40, where he says that he will analyze catharsis in a work on poetry. This promise that can easily be taken as referring to the *Poetics*.[49] He does not mention tragedy explicitly in *Politics* VIII.7, and later in

49 Depew ("Politics, Music, and Contemplation in Aristotle's Ideal State," 368-369) cautions against reading Aristotle's comment here as a reference to the *Poetics*, suggesting that the comment in *Politics* VIII.7 refers to the purification brought about by Dionysian music rather than tragedy, and that it is not certain that Aristotle's mention of a work on poetry is a reference to what we have of the *Poetics*. My argument does not depend on the connection to catharsis specifically. My point is only that if Aristotle is thinking of the *Poetics*, whether or not he has tragic catharsis in mind here in the *Politics*, then the discussion of tragedy must be relevant to the context of the *Politics*. Depew also claims that "Although music is part of tragedy, it cannot be said that tragedy is part of music," but fails to see the significance in Aristotle's view that tragedy incorporates instrumental music and poetry into a more

the chapter it becomes clear that the “tunes of Olympus,” not tragedy, are the source of catharsis he has in mind. Still, the mention of a work on the poetic art suggests that tragedy, the primary subject of the extant portion of the *Poetics*, is not far from his mind in *Politics* VIII.7, and that perhaps he went on in the *Politics* to say something about how tragedy contributes to leisure and makes for some kind of philosophy. The textual evidence is not by itself conclusive, so my turning to Aristotle’s account of tragedy in the *Poetics* ultimately recommends itself on the effectiveness with which it solves the basic problem of what the citizens’ leisure consists in. If indeed tragedy provides us with a kind of music that could be by nature an object of thinking done for its own sake, the problem of how leisure is to be spent in philosophy whose object is music would be solved. In the remaining chapters, I will make the case that tragedy is capable of fulfilling that role.

complete whole.

CHAPTER 2

I have argued that the content of philosophical leisure in the best city is music. The *Poetics* is the only work of Aristotle's that analyzes a form of music, namely tragedy. In this chapter, I will argue that according to Aristotle's account of tragedy in the *Poetics*, the final cause of tragedy is wonder. I will argue that wonder in the *Poetics* is analogous in this way to wonder in the *Metaphysics*. In that text, Aristotle presents wonder as recognition of an impasse (ἀπορία) and argues that it motivates a search for causes. Aristotle also finds wonder in the contemplation of the first principle all being, i.e. the unmoved mover, at the end of philosophical inquiry. I will take this picture of wonder as a model for the *Poetics*, and argue that the tragic hero presents an impasse for the viewer. The function of wonder is to generate thought by presenting the viewer with a kind of impasse in the form of an apparent contradiction. I will argue that fear and pity help to make tragedy wondrous in this way by highlighting the opposing sides of the tragic hero's character.

I. Wonder in the *Metaphysics*

I will begin with the *Metaphysics*. In *Metaphysics* A.2 and Λ.7 Aristotle suggests that wonder is an essential part of philosophical inquiry. In A.2, he describes it as a motivation to engage in inquiry, and in Λ.7 as part of contemplation of the unmoved mover. Because the *Metaphysics* is the text in which Aristotle engages in the fullest form of philosophy, insofar as it lays out a theoretical inquiry that investigates first principles and the nature of being as such

(οὐσία), these two chapters set the standard by which to determine to what extent the wonder in the *Poetics* is philosophical. In the next section I will argue that wonder is also an important theme in the analysis of tragedy Aristotle gives in the *Poetics*, and that the wonder in tragedy can be understood as parallel to the wonder found in *Metaphysics* A.2 and Λ.7. Like the wonder in the *Metaphysics*, the wonder generated by tragedy includes both the awareness of an apparent contradiction that causes us to search for knowledge that would resolve the contradiction, and also a continuous reflection on the nature of the object. Though the contradiction is resolved on one level, the object is inherently worth thinking about and thus continues to inspire meditation. I will show that wonder in the *Poetics* imitates the two stages of philosophy as Aristotle accounts for them in *Metaphysics* A.2 and Λ.7.

The first time Aristotle refers to wonder in the *Metaphysics* is in the context of explaining what kind of knowledge the science of metaphysics is. In A.2, he argues that wisdom, i.e. first philosophy, has a number of distinct features: it somehow knows everything, it knows what is most difficult to know, it is the most precise knowledge, it is most able to teach causes, it is most for its own sake, and it commands other kinds of knowledge insofar as it knows the good of everything (982b4-7). Because it is only for its own sake and is in this sense free (982b25-28), other kinds of knowledge are for its sake. All these features belong to wisdom because it is knowledge of the first principles and causes. The claim that wisdom is only for its own sake and therefore is not useful for the sake of anything else is particularly important to our understanding of wonder. For wisdom to be for its own sake alone means that wisdom is not valuable because it is useful for other things. Knowledge of first principles is not productive of any material good or action that includes deliberation for some end, but is worth possessing on its own account. All

humans seek knowledge by nature and knowledge of first principles is the highest form of knowledge, because the objects of wisdom are the highest causes and therefore most knowable (982a30-982b4). Reason is most fully actualized by the highest knowledge, i.e. metaphysical wisdom, and although other kinds of knowledge such as mathematics are also for their own sakes and are valuable for human nature, their objects are inherently less knowable. Wisdom most fully fulfills human nature and is worth more than any other kind of knowledge, and so is most for its own sake.

Aristotle argues that wisdom is only for its own sake and not for anything else by analyzing the nature of wonder and its significance for the human mind. It may seem strange to us, but the claim that knowledge is better insofar as it is for its own sake and not useful for anything else is typical of Aristotle. Before I unpack the precise nature of wonder, I want to show how it contributes to Aristotle's understanding of the practice of philosophy and inquiry generally. His argument is that knowledge of first principles is valuable for its own sake *because* it is motived, and therefore conditioned in relation to what it seeks, by wonder. He gives a sketch of how philosophy developed, noting first that it begins with wonder (982b12-13). In inquiring into nature, he says, people were first puzzled by the things "near at hand," i.e. earthly phenomena, later turning to impasses about "greater things," i.e. the celestial bodies (982b13-17).[50] To be puzzled is to be in wonder, and someone "who wonders and is at an impasse considers himself to be ignorant" (982b17-18). When we realize we are ignorant we naturally want to escape that ignorance and therefore to engage in philosophy (982b19-21). We have no other goal when we are in wonder than knowledge.

50 I use Joe Sachs' translation (*Aristotle's* Metaphysics, Green Lion Press, 2002) unless otherwise stated.

Aristotle uses geometry as an example of a kind of knowledge that is pursued for its own sake. He accounts for its development in Egypt not by pointing to the necessity of surveying the floodplain of the Nile, as we might. If geometry were for surveying land alone, its end would be crop-production and justice, since re-allotment of property after the river recedes is a matter of justice. These are practical and productive ends. Instead, he claims, as soon as the Egyptians had already provided for necessities and had leisure from labor, they began to develop geometry simply out of a desire for knowledge. Wisdom of first principles and causes is like geometry in this respect, but as the highest kind of philosophical knowledge, wisdom is most of all for its own sake. It follows that this kind of knowledge is free and most divine (983a5-6), and while all other kinds of knowledge are more necessary, philosophical wisdom is the best (983a10-11).

As a spur to the search for knowledge, wonder is integral to Aristotle's understanding of what it means to practice philosophy or any other intellectual endeavor. The argument in *Metaphysics* A.2 is that we seek knowledge not in order to produce anything or achieve an end, but because we desire knowledge. Even if knowledge enables us to gain some practical benefit, we do not seek knowledge of the reason why there appears to be a contradiction primarily for that benefit. We would seek knowledge even without such a benefit. The point is that Aristotle offers his analysis of wonder as proof that we value knowledge simply for its own sake even apart from what is useful. For this reason we should consider carefully how it works in the *Metaphysics* and *Poetics*.

Aristotle characterizes wonder as a kind of intellectual impasse, and therefore as an awareness of one's own ignorance. But it is difficult to see how mere ignorance could motivate sustained scientific inquiry. There are many things of which we realize we are ignorant that we

have little or no desire to know. For Aristotle's argument to work, wonder must be a definite and powerful spur to inquiry, rather than a vague sense curiosity. I suggest the key to understanding the kind of wonder with which philosophy begins can be found in its association with an impasse in *Metaphysics* A.2 and B.1 (e.g. διαπορήσαντες, 982b15). The Greek term translated as "impasse" (ἀπορία) is literally "lack of passage." In a philosophical context it is an obstruction to thought. Plato's "aporetic" dialogues are a well-known expression of this impasse. Each of them investigates a virtue (or virtue itself), but ends inconclusively. In the *Meno* for example, Socrates argues that virtue is knowledge and that virtue is not knowledge. At the end of the dialogue, he and Meno are stuck, with no way through the philosophical difficulties. In that dialogue, the impasse has real philosophical value insofar as it is only after reaching a point at which we realize that we are ignorant that we can make progress toward the truth regarding the object of investigation.

The philosophical problems Aristotle offers in *Metaphysics* B are impasses of a similar kind. More specifically, they are dilemmas regarding the nature of metaphysics and its proper objects.[51] In each case, Aristotle offers two mutually exclusive and exhaustive metaphysical claims. One such impasse is whether it belongs to one or more than one kind of knowledge to contemplate the four kinds of causes (996a18-20) outlined in the *Physics*. Briefly, the impasse is that metaphysics cannot, apparently, be knowledge of all the causes, since no one science knows all the causes, nor can it be knowledge of any particular cause among the four, since knowledge of no one cause meets the criteria for metaphysics that Aristotle lays out in A.2.[52] Metaphysics also cannot be knowledge of only two or three of the causes, since knowledge of each kind of

51 Edward Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle's* Metaphysics*: Books Alpha-Delta* (Parmenides Publishing, 2009), 205ff..

52 Metaphysics cannot be knowledge of two or three of the causes, since knowledge of each kind of cause has a claim to the criteria in A.2.

cause has a good claim to the criteria in A.2. To put it bluntly, there is good reason to think that metaphysics must be knowledge of all the causes, but there can be no science of all the causes, so there can be no metaphysics. Aristotle does not take this problem as proof that there is no science of metaphysics, but takes it as a challenge that metaphysical inquiry must meet.

The content of the arguments for both sides of each of the impasses in *Metaphysics* B and their solutions is not my present concern. The way that Aristotle characterizes them is essential: if the arguments are good, an impasse presents us with a dilemma, such as the dilemma that wisdom must be knowledge of all the causes, but it cannot be knowledge of all the causes. This is an important impasse in the inquiry into first principles, since it addresses what the nature of the knowledge of the first causes would have to be, if there is such knowledge. Given that the two sides of the dilemma are the only possibilities, the impasse leaves us with a contradiction: either A or B is true, but neither A nor B is true. Until the dilemma is solved in some way, we are faced with a contradiction and are at an impasse.

Aristotle explains why it is necessary to work through impasses in B.1 in an argument that recalls the paradox of learning in Plato's *Meno* (80d-e). He claims that it is necessary to go through impasses proper to the inquiry into first principles because "it is not possible to untie a knot one is ignorant of" (*Met.* 995a29-30). When we face an impasse we are like someone tied up and unable to move forward. We ought to be sure that we recognize the impasses first, so that we can untie the knots, as it were, and move forward. Otherwise, we will not know which way to go. Furthermore, "one never knows whether one has found the thing sought or not" (995a36-995b1) until one has faced the impasses. We ought to be sure that we are at an impasse and "tied up" before we begin to inquire, since otherwise we will not know where to go or what we are

looking for. The problems inherent to the inquiry are paradoxically a guide to knowledge, because we cannot know where to turn in thought without an appreciation of the impasse. On the other hand, the end is clear to one who has been at an impasse, says Aristotle (995b1-2). Facing philosophical problems head on, and getting genuinely stuck in an impasse, is a step toward knowledge. If we try to brush a problem aside, we will not learn. Once we work through the impasse and become thoroughly tied-up, we know what the truth, whatever it is, would have to be: it would have to be a solution to the problem. An impasse guides thought because it is what the solution would have to undo in order to offer real knowledge. For Aristotle, to know is to know a cause (*Physics* 194b18-20), so the solution would explain why there appeared to be a contradiction while at the same time resolving it. Since there can be no real contradiction in nature, knowledge of the cause for why things appear as they do must also show that there is no contradiction and thus solve the impasse. By the very fact of solving the impasse (without, of course, generating worse problems), the solution gives us confidence that we have knowledge.

In *Metaphysics* A.2, Aristotle illustrates how wonder leads to philosophy with a few examples of impasses. The examples are: an artificial construct that moves itself, the reversals of the sun's motion across the sky at the solstices, and the incommensurability of the diagonal of a right triangle with its legs (983a12-17). Aristotle claims that everyone begins from wondering whether these things are as they seem. Wonder presupposes ignorance, but "it is necessary to end in what is opposite and better" (983a18-19), i.e. knowledge. In each of these examples, wonder motivates us to seek knowledge.

Aristotle does not fully explain the problems, so we have to reconstruct his thought to see precisely what he has in mind. The first problem, that of the automaton, is perhaps the easiest to

reconstruct. An automaton is a self-moving, artificial device, but according to the distinction between natural and artificial things that Aristotle articulates in the *Physics*, only natural things move themselves (192b11-14). According to this distinction between the natural and artificial, the initial sight of an artifact that appears to move itself is puzzling, as it seems to contradict the claim that only natural things move themselves. We are faced with a contradiction: only natural things move themselves, but the automaton is not natural and yet moves itself. Neither side of the contradiction can be easily dismissed. We cannot deny the appearance of self-motion in an artifact. On the other hand, all artificial things are made by someone with the appropriate productive art, because artificial things do not make themselves. A house only comes to be if the builder builds it, and is not constructed by other houses in the way that living things reproduce other living things with the same nature. In general the motion of artificial things is due to an external source outside the artifact itself. In contrast, natural things move themselves insofar as they grow and reproduce without being set in motion by the productive art of a human being. The question here is how an artificial mechanism can be constructed so that the automaton appears to move itself.

Once we recognize the problem the automaton presents us with, we realize our ignorance and naturally seek some kind of solution that will give us knowledge. The solution in this case is a matter of seeing how some external cause gives motion to the automaton through the internal arrangement of its parts and how they work together. Once we grasp the mechanism, we see that the automaton does not really move itself. We see instead how it is moved by something external, by seeing how an external cause gives motion to the automaton. We come to realize that it is self-moving only in the sense that its structure enables something external to move it in

certain ways. By going through an investigation into its internal structure, we undermine one side of the contradiction and grasp the cause that makes it appear that the automaton seems to move itself. The problem of the automaton and subsequent inquiry thus serves as a paradigm for the movement of philosophical inquiry, starting in wonder at an apparent contradiction, followed by a search for a solution, and finally knowledge of the cause, which undoes the contradiction while at the same time showing why there appeared to seemed to be a contradiction in the first place.

The other two examples, the reversals of the sun and the incommensurability of the diagonal of a right triangle with its sides, reinforce this pattern. The sun's motion presents us with a contradiction, says Aristotle. He does not elaborate, but presumably the impasse is that as the sun moves across the sky, from summer to winter or winter to summer, we would naturally expect it to continue to move in the same direction, to rise and set in a continuously more southward or northward direction. Instead, the sun reverses its motion at the summer and winter solstices: it stops moving in the same direction and begins going back in the opposite direction. In addition to its rotation around the earth, the sun not only moves northward (or southward), but also moves southward (or northward). This is a rather surprising phenomenon when we reflect on it, and when we have not yet grasped the cause. We tend to take the solution – the earth's rotation around the sun along with the tilt of its axis – for granted, but this solution was of course unavailable to Aristotle. Even so, Aristotle's point is still valid: the phenomenon naturally motivates the mind to look for a cause.

Aristotle does not offer a solution to the impasse in the *Metaphysics*, but he raises a similar impasse, referring to it as an impasse, in *De Caelo* II.12. He asks why the sun and the

other heavenly bodies that are relatively close to the earth (e.g. the moon) have fewer motions than the heavenly bodies between them and the fixed stars (e.g. Mars) (*De Caelo* 291b28-31). The unmoved movers are in the best state and so have no motion, while the fixed stars, which are in the outermost sphere and therefore closest to the first principle of all motion, move in one sphere and therefore have one motion (291b32). The bodies below them have more motions, but not in the way we would expect them to. Aristotle reasons that there should be a gradual increase in the motions of bodies as the distance between them and the fixed stars increases. The closer they are to the earth, the more motions they should have. However, the sun has fewer motions (i.e. three: east to west, north to south, and south to north) than the planets between it and the fixed stars (291b34-292a3). Aristotle's astronomy contradicts the expectation that things will have more motions the farther they are from the outermost sphere.

The solution Aristotle offers is that the heavenly spheres are all living things with action (πρᾶξις) (292a18-22). For this reason the number of their motions does not simply increase in number as the bodies are located closer to the earth, but again decreases after a certain point. As living things with agency, they aim at some good, but require more actions and motions to achieve their end as they come to be further from what is best. Those that are farther from the outermost sphere are unable to achieve their end even with more motions (292a30-292b1), and so they move with fewer motions because they are farther from the best. The life and action of the heavenly bodies thus explains both why the intermediate bodies have more motions and why the bodies closer to earth have fewer. Aristotle argues by analogy between the heavenly bodies and living things on earth that this also accounts for why they have fewer motions. On earth, humans naturally have the most movements of all animals, because being rational they are able

to reach the highest good to the highest degree. Other living things on earth have fewer motions than humans because they are less able to reach the highest good (292b19-22). The same holds for the heavenly bodies: after their motions increase so far, they come to have fewer rather than more motions because of their natural limits, so that the sun and moon have fewer motions than the planets between them and the outermost sphere. Life accounts for why the sun moves with fewer motions than other heavenly bodies. The key point is that living things accomplish their ends to different degrees because they are living, whereas inanimate things do so solely depending on how far they are from the outermost sphere.

Admittedly, Aristotle indicates a degree of hesitation regarding this solution. Trying to solve this impasse is audacious, he says, though done out of "eagerness rather than rashness" (291b26). Admitting his limited understanding of the motions of the heavenly bodies, he notes that we should not be surprised if the explanation he gives of the number of motions of the heavenly bodies is not fully adequate. Even supposing the solution is essentially right, we still do not know how the nature of each heavenly body produces the precise number of motions it has. Nonetheless, Aristotle shows that the number of motions of each body is due to the nature of each as a living thing. The solution does not show why things have to be the way they are, but shows that they are "not unreasonable" (292a17-18).

Aristotle's discussion of the number of motions of the heavenly bodies in the *De Caelo* in effect offers a solution to the impasse raised in the *Metaphysics* regarding the motions of the sun. According to Aristotle's reasoning in the *De Caelo*, the sun reverses its motion at the solstices because it is a living thing. It has an end – to contemplate the unmoved mover – and this accounts for its motion. But it does not have just one circular motion, because it is too far

removed from the outermost sphere. It is less perfect than the fixed stars, and so has a multiplicity of motions. However, its nature is more limited than those of the intermediate planets, and so it has fewer motions than them. Obviously this solution does not tell us why the sun has exactly three motions, but it does explain why it has more than one. We would still like to know what the nature of the sun is such that it moves in precisely the way it does. Nonetheless, for Aristotle the basis for this question has been answered by the insight that the sun is not inanimate, but is a living thing with a unique nature.

Finally, we come to the impasse of the incommensurability of the hypotenuse of a right triangle with its remaining sides. Again, Aristotle does not fully explain exactly what the problem is, so I offer a reconstruction in terms of the analysis of what an impasse is in *Metaphysics* B. The problem here is due to the mathematical nature of a line, which is infinitely divisible in thought, and can therefore be divided into any number of equal parts. As Aristotle says, “it seems amazing to all those who have not yet seen the cause if anything is not measured by the smallest part” (*Met.* 983a16-17). Since we can always further divide a line, there is no limit to how small the parts we divide it into are. We ought therefore to expect that the three sides of any triangle would be divisible by some common measure. It seems that we could always find a common measure of any three lines if it is always possible to divide those lines into smaller parts.

The problem as I understand it is that on the one hand, any three lines should be commensurable because of the infinite divisibility of a line, but on the other, the sides of a right triangle are not commensurable. The cause that inquiry is compelled to seek is the nature of the right triangle as it figures into the Pythagorean theorem. The Pythagorean theorem demonstrates

the attribute of incommensurability between the three sides of the right triangle by showing that the squares of the two sides of the right triangle are together equal in area to the square of the hypotenuse. Since that is so, there are relatively few sets of three lines two of whose squares are together equal to that of the third in such a way that each square is the square of a whole number. Apart from these "Pythagorean triples" the lines will be incommensurable. In Aristotle's terms, it shows that incommensurability is an essential attribute of a right triangle whose lines are not measured by a Pythagorean triple. The cause of incommensurability is the nature of the right triangle, the squares of whose sides are not usually commensurable. The pattern is again recognition of a contradiction, awareness of our ignorance and a desire to know, then a process of inquiry to discover the cause. The cause shows us that one of the contradictory claims of the impasse is false, undermining the contradiction.

The general pattern in all three impasses is recognition of an apparent contradiction and wonder, which naturally motivates inquiry into the cause, knowledge of which gives the solution that in some way solves the problem. Wonder is at the beginning of this process, but what happens to it when the impasse is resolved? In the cases above, it seems to disappear, because if there is no problem, there is apparently nothing to wonder at. The geometer, says Aristotle, seems to no longer be in a state of wonder about the incommensurability of the sides of a right triangle, and would be in wonder only if it turned out that the sides were commensurable, "for nothing would be so surprising to a geometer as if the diagonal were to become commensurable" (983a19-21). If wonder ends when we discover the cause that undoes the contradiction, then wonder would have value only when one is in ignorance. It would move us toward the goal of knowledge, but would cease once its object is attained. This kind of wonder alone could not

have the importance Aristotle places on it for tragedy, as we will see. It could not be present in our continued contemplation of a tragedy, because such contemplation is not a mere search for a solution that can be left behind once it is solved. Even after we achieve a thoughtful appreciation for a tragedy like *Oedipus Rex* or *Antigone*, we continue to reflect on the work. The wonder in A.2 would be an inadequate model for our contemplation of tragedy if it suggests that wonder ends once one finds the solution to the impasse.

However, before we accept this conclusion, we should think more carefully about wonder and the examples of impasses in *Metaphysics* A.2. Even when we find the solution, there is still something amazing about the automaton, the motion of the sun, and the incommensurability of the right triangle. The extent to which human-made artifacts imitate natural substances, seeming to move themselves, is amazing, even after we recognize that they have been constructed in such a way that the cause of their motion is external. The intricacy of the internal mechanisms of many artifacts is wondrous, although we often take them for granted. It is usually only when we encounter some new device that our wonder is aroused, for example by the most recent advances in machine learning algorithms. Our wonder today is not so easily aroused, but this is, I would suggest, partly a matter of the expectation we have come to have in modernity for constant technological innovation. Even so, cutting-edge developments still amaze us. We know that the many devices that seem to move themselves are constructed by human beings, and so do not move themselves in the relevant sense, but we continue to be at times surprised and fascinated by them. From Aristotle's perspective, this observation proves the point: even when we know the new device is created by human design, and is dependent on an external cause, it is still amazing to us.

In A.2, Aristotle gives his attention to the beginning of philosophical inquiry, and describes wonder in relation to this starting point. Wonder here is a motivation to search for knowledge, and is thus directly related to the final cause of philosophy, but is felt when one is in ignorance. In his discussion on the nature of the unmoved mover in *Metaphysics* Λ.7, Aristotle characterizes wonder in terms of the contemplative knowledge of the final cause of all being. He argues that there is a first principle, the unmoved mover, that causes all other motion without itself being in motion. While not in motion, it causes motion by being the object of thought and desire. It is a final cause. Not being in motion, it is always the same and always active (1072a24-26). It is thought thinking itself (1072b19-21). It has life, because the activity of the intellect is life, and because it is always active, its life is the best life (1072b27-28). Its life is therefore appropriate to that of a god (1072b29-30). We have intellects, as it does, and our intellects are capable of being active as well, but only at times and for a limited duration (1072b14-15). Because it is eternally and fully actual intellect, and active to a greater degree than the activity of our intellect ever is, it is *wondrous* (1072b24-26).

The unmoved mover is the first principle and cause of everything, and our knowledge of it constitutes the goal of metaphysical inquiry. Knowledge of it is the end of philosophy, and so for Aristotle wonder is not only at the beginning of philosophy (98211-13), but also present at the end of philosophy. Wonder at the unmoved mover is different from wonder at one of the impasses described in A.2 insofar as wonder at the unmoved mover does not aim to solve a problem. It does not seek knowledge of a further cause – the unmoved mover is the first cause, and is itself uncaused. That is what makes it wondrous. On the other hand, wonder is still a desire for knowledge and a motivation for thought in the face of what is beautiful. The heavenly

bodies eternally contemplate the unmoved mover and are moved by it as an object of love (1072a26-27; 1072b3-4), and we are like them to the extent that we want to continue contemplating the unmoved movers out of wonder at their natures. The automaton is wondrous like this, though to a lesser degree: it is wondrous not only before we recognize the cause of its motion, but afterwards as well insofar as its internal mechanism is wondrous. So, it turns out that for Aristotle wonder is not only a desire to know, a desire to be discarded once we have knowledge, but is still present in our reflection on what is inherently worth thinking about.

II. Wonder in the *Poetics*

I turn now to the nature of wonder in the *Poetics*. I will use the two forms of wonder in the *Metaphysics*, the first of which belongs to ignorance and the second to knowledge, to frame my discussion of what makes tragedy wondrous. I will show that on Aristotle's account, tragedy has philosophical value, and that wonder is the final end of tragedy. Since wonder is the beginning of philosophical inquiry, wonder makes tragedy philosophical by provoking thought and leading to a philosophical insight. In the next chapter, I will show that the insight is an insight about the moral nature of virtue and happiness.

On my interpretation, Aristotle's view of tragedy subordinates the emotional dimension of tragedy to an intelligible content internal to tragedy. This claim may seem to many like a non-starter, since the *Poetics* seems to point more toward an emotional than an intellectual end. After all, Aristotle defines tragedy in terms of the emotions of fear and pity, which are necessary elements for the tragic hero's ἁμαρτία, as he discusses in *Poetics* 13. There is however definite textual support for an intellectual reading of tragedy. First is Aristotle's explanation as to how poetry came into existence. He gives two closely related causes of poetry: the educational role

of imitation in youth, and the pleasure we find in imitation (*Poetics* 1448b7-9). Our first steps in learning happen through imitation, says Aristotle (1448b7-8), but learning continues to be pleasant throughout life. As a form of imitation, poetry is a product of the rational nature of humans, who are the most imitative of animals (1448b6-7). Poetry is therefore as a whole essentially connected to the use of reason. The final cause of poetry is knowledge: we enjoy poetry because of our desire to know. Understanding (μανθάνειν) is pleasant for everyone, not only for philosophers, though philosophers find understanding pleasant more than others (1448b12-15). Poetry is therefore an embodiment of the universal human desire to know that Aristotle posits at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*. Furthermore, the cognitive end of poetry is somehow internal to the poetry itself. Reason is not only a condition for poetry, as if the value of poetry were primarily in something non-cognitive, like emotion. Aristotle implies that we value poetry primarily for the rational activity it inspires, an activity which takes the poetry itself as its object. Non-philosophers, he says, enjoy seeing images (εἰκόνας) because they are able to infer (συλλογίζεσθαι) what the image is an image of (1448b15-17). It is pleasant, for example, to see a painting of some god or hero and infer who that god or hero is from the symbols indicating their identity. The kind of learning that goes on here is not a result separate from the contemplation of the imitation, in the way that, according to Lord, tragedy is a means to allowing reason to function properly through its moderation of the passions. If that were the case, the rational value of tragedy would not be about a work of tragedy itself, but would merely be facilitated by tragedy. Instead, for Aristotle reason is active in the contemplation of the imitation. Aristotle is speaking of poetry in broad terms here in *Poetics* 4, not specifically of tragedy, but tragedy is a form of poetry. Tragedy must therefore have knowledge as its final end, and it must

be a knowledge that comes about as a result of thinking about the tragedy itself, and not merely as end to which tragedy is an entirely separate means.

The second explicit textual basis for the claim that on Aristotle's account tragedy has primarily value is Aristotle's claim in *Poetics* 9 that poetry is "more philosophical… than history" (1451b5-6).[53] It follows from this claim that poetry is philosophical, since poetry cannot be more philosophical than history without itself being philosophical. The way in which these genres are more or less philosophical is a matter of their universality and internal unity.[54] Poetry is not a matter of what has happened, but of what might happen according to what is likely or necessary (1451a37-38), a point Aristotle explores in the chapters leading up to his comparison of poetry to history. History is less philosophical than poetry because it has less unity. He observes that there is no inherent connection between the many actions narrated in history. The events narrated in history are particular actions done by many different people. This is not to say that there is no continuity in history, but that one action performed by one agent has no necessary connection with that of another. There is no necessary connection even between the actions of one agent; for example, it was not necessary that Alcibiades, whom Aristotle mentions here, go on the Sicilian expedition and later turn traitor after being recalled to Athens. As a genre, history is a recounting of contingent actions, and therefore has little unity – certainly not the unity of a single action, which as an action aims at a distinct and definite goal. A work of poetry on the other hand imitates one action, and is therefore universal. Being more universal than history, it is more philosophical (1451b6-7). This is a strong claim to make, and cannot be ignored. Aristotle

53 I use Joe Sachs' translation (Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Joe Sachs. Focus Publishing, 2006) unless otherwise stated.
54 See J. M. Armstrong, "Aristotle on the Philosophical Nature of Poetry," *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 48 (1998): 447-455 and Silvia Carli, "Poetry is More Philosophical than History: Aristotle on Mimesis and Form," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 64, no. 2 (2010): 303-336 for arguments that the universal is an action.

leaves us wondering though how the greater unity and universality of poetry makes it not just a work of reason, but somehow philosophical. I am to answer to this question by analyzing tragedy through the notion of wonder. The point I want to emphasize now is that for Aristotle tragedy, while somehow incorporating emotion, goes beyond emotion to produce an intellectual and even philosophical activity.

I will turn now to the theme of wonder in Aristotle's *Poetics* and argue that it reflects the two kinds of wonder Aristotle presents in the *Metaphysics*. Wonder in the *Metaphysics* is both puzzlement at an impasse and amazement in contemplation of a beautiful object. I will argue that wonder both kinds of wonder are present in tragedy as Aristotle understands it. The first is present insofar as tragedy raises the impasse that the distinguishing feature of the tragic hero's character (e.g. Oedipus' wisdom) is both a virtue and a vice. An impasse must have a solution, and I will argue in the next chapter that the solution to the tragic impasse is a realization that good fortune is not happiness, as suggested by Solon, whom Aristotle discusses in a passage directly relevant to the significance of fortune for happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, the wondrousness of tragedy cannot end with the solution to the problem. The dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides continually provoke reflection and admiration even today, because they are not merely puzzles for reason to solve in the way that a cross-word puzzle is. I will show how the solution to the tragic impasse naturally leads to contemplation on the nature of human character, making tragedy a wondrous object of contemplation. For Aristotle, tragedy is continually thought provoking, containing both the beginning and end of the philosophical process of inquiry.

There are two passages in the *Poetics*, one in chapter 9 and the other in 24, in which Aristotle suggests that wonder plays a fundamental role in tragedy. The term he uses here, τὸ θαυμαστόν, is cognate to those used in the *Metaphysics* passages I have already referred to. But this is not the only term in Greek denoting wonder. In chapter 25 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle describes a well-made work of poetry as "awe-striking (1460b25)." Here he uses the adjective ἐκπληκτικός, cognate to the noun ἔκπληξις and verb ἐκπλήττω, "to drive out of one's senses, amaze, astound." The key notion is a sudden and forceful striking of the soul from an external source, what we would call "amazement," and therefore a kind of wonder. Together these passages show that Aristotle thinks of wonder as essential to tragedy and closely connected to its final cause. I will examine these passages closely and show that for Aristotle wonder is the final cause of tragedy. Later I will address the question of how wonder relates to the elements Aristotle uses to define tragedy in *Poetics* 6, namely fear and pity, and catharsis.

The first passage we should consider is in *Poetics* 9, where Aristotle mentions wonder in relation to the narrative development of a tragedy:

> But since the imitation is not only of a complete action but also of things that produce fear and pity, this comes about most of all when things have happened in a paradoxical way on account of one another. For in this way it is more a source of wonder than if they came from chance or luck, since even among the ones that come from luck, it is the ones that seem to have happened as if by design that are the most productive of wonder.[55]

55 I have modified Sachs' translation (*Aristotle: Poetics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Focus Publishing, 2006), 33), inverting the phrases "in a paradoxical way" and "on account of one another" in the first sentence, reflecting the order in the Greek. The "in this way" in the next sentence refers to the unity of necessity, which Aristotle then juxtaposes to unity by chance or luck. Changing the order of the Greek makes this train of thought I want to highlight less clear.

> ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐ μόνον τελείας ἐστὶ πράξεως ἡ μίμησις ἀλλὰ καὶ φοβερῶν καὶ ἐλεεινῶν, ταῦτα δὲ γίνεται καὶ μάλιστα ὅταν γένηται παρὰ τὴν δόξαν δι᾽ ἄλληλα: τὸ γὰρ θαυμαστὸν οὕτως ἔξει μᾶλλον ἢ εἰ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης, ἐπεὶ καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τύχης ταῦτα θαυμασιώτατα δοκεῖ ὅσα ὥσπερ ἐπίτηδες φαίνεται γεγονέναι (1452a1-7)

The passage comes at the end of a discussion focusing on the narrative unity of tragedy, spanning chapters 7 through 9, in which Aristotle argues that a tragedy ought to develop according to what is "likely or necessary" (1451a12-13). On this basis, he argues in chapter 8 that a tragedy must have internal unity between its parts, so that the beginning, middle, and end of the tragedy fit together naturally, like the parts of a living thing, and should not be divided into independent episodes that have no likely or necessary connection. The argument is that a tragedy is an imitation of one action (1451a30-32), so the narrative must be a real whole, and not be broken into fragments without internal connection. Nonetheless, a properly constructed tragedy also develops in a surprising, "paradoxical" way. A narrative of this kind is naturally results in wonder as well as fear and pity. Aristotle does not explain precisely what he means by paradox here, but can be explained in terms of the elements of discovery and reversal that he introduces later in the *Poetics*. The paradigmatic tragedy shows the hero going from good to bad fortune not gradually, but suddenly, all in a moment. Discovery and reversal, which ideally happen at the same time (1452a32-33), are the turning points of tragedies. *Oedipus Rex* is the most well-known example, one which Aristotle himself refers to in his account of reversal. Given the importance of reversal (about which I will have more to say later), Aristotle's comment here in *Poetics* 9 makes wonder the natural fruit of a tragic narrative, as if wonder is the final cause of

tragedy. When a tragedy contains both necessity and paradox, he says, it will effectively inspire fear and pity, and "in this way" the wonder of the tragedy will be greater (τὸ γὰρ θαυμαστὸν οὕτως ἕξει μᾶλλον).

Later in the *Poetics*, in two closely linked passages dealing with questions regarding epic poetry, Aristotle reinforces the suggestive comment in *Poetics* 9. First, in *Poetics* 24 he claims that wonder is necessary for tragedy. He makes this claim when comparing the inherent capacities of epic and tragedy to produce wonder:

> While it is necessary to produce wonder in tragedies, there is more room in epic poetry for something unaccountable, by means of which a source of wonder results most easily, since we are not looking at the person acting.
> δεῖ μὲν οὖν ἐν ταῖς τραγῳδίαις ποιεῖν τὸ θαυμαστόν, μᾶλλον δ᾽ ἐνδέχεται ἐν τῇ ἐποποιίᾳ τὸ ἄλογον, δι᾽ ὃ συμβαίνει μάλιστα τὸ θαυμαστόν, διὰ τὸ μὴ ὁρᾶν εἰς τὸν πράττοντα (1460a11-14)

In observing that epic has more freedom in the means by which it produces wonder, Aristotle observes almost in passing that tragedy needs to produce wonder. This is a strong claim that adds weight to the comment in chapter 9. It means that wonder is somehow essential to a well-produced tragedy. Aristotle does not explain why wonder is necessary, or how a tragedy would produce wonder. Nonetheless, we should take note of what Aristotle's claim implies: that it is necessary for tragedy to be wondrous.

Second, in *Poetics* 25, Aristotle claims that the end of epic, and by implication the end of tragedy, is wonder, though his terminology is different in this passage from what we find in *Poetics* 9 and 24. He says in chapter 25 that Achilles' gesture in the so-called pursuit scene of

the *Iliad* in which Achilles chases Hector around the walls of Troy and finally kills him is impossible on its own, but Homer is right to use it in the story because it "hits upon the its end (τυγχάνει τοῦ τέλους)… if in this way [the poet] makes that thing itself or some other part of the poem more awe-striking (ἐκπληκτικώτερον)" (1460b24-26). Aristotle explicitly refers to the end of poetry. The target to hit in epic is what is awe-striking. Therefore, when Aristotle argues that the impossible is permissible when it lets epic achieve its end, and that it achieves its end when what happens is more awe-striking, he is saying that the quality of being awe-striking is the final cause of epic.

Aristotle's Greek is different from what we saw above; the term "awe-striking" is not contained in the *Poetics* 9 passage. In the earlier chapters, Aristotle uses the term τὸ θαυμαστόν. Nonetheless, to be awe-striking is to be wondrous. The Greek word translated "awe-striking" is the adjective ἐκπληκτικός. The LSJ gives "astounding," "surprising" and "startling" for ἐκπληκτικός. The cognate verb ἐκπλήσσειν means first to drive away or expel, and by extension to shock, amaze, or astound. The verb θαυμάζω and its cognates, of which τὸ θαυμαστόν is one, can denote either the feeling of wonder, or a wondrous object, and ἐκπλήσσειν too has this dual role. ἔκπληξις is wonder in the subjective sense, and is caused by something that is wondrous, including what is ἐκπληκτικός, i.e. what is wondrous.[56] The two notions of τὸ θαυμαστόν and ἔκπληξις have different connotations, but they have a similar semantic range. Aristotle's comment therefore amounts to saying that wonder is the final cause of epic poetry.

Although the comment above is directed primarily toward epic rather than tragedy, what Aristotle says about epic in regard to wonder is relevant to tragedy, because he sees epic and

56 Sachs points out the connection between wonder and ἔκπληξις, and calls it "the experience of wonder" (*Aristotle: Poetics*, 15).

tragedy as analogous to each other. Epic differs from tragedy in being narrated rather than acted (1449b26-27), and in its length and meter (1459b17-18). Nonetheless, narratives of the two genres are similar in structure, following a similar course of development. They have the same narrative forms: like tragedy, epic can be either simple or complex, depending on whether they have reversal and discovery (1459b7-11). Aristotle classifies the *Iliad* as a simple narrative of suffering with no reversal or discovery, while he classifies the *Odyssey* as complex because it contains discovery (1459b13-15). These categories of simple and complex are the same he uses to characterize tragedy in *Poetics* 10, according to the presence or absence of reversal and discovery. Aristotle's comment that the final cause of epic is to be awe-striking and wondrous is therefore tantamount to saying that the final cause of tragedy is to be awe-striking and wondrous.

Before I go on, I want to unpack Aristotle's thought on how epic can be wondrous. Aristotle's comment is part of his defense of Homer's use of what is "impossible" (ἀδύνατον, 1460b23) in a narrative. His justification of inserting what is impossible in a narrative is the wondrous effect it facilitates. When the impossible makes a narrative "more awe-striking" (ἐκπληκτικώτερον, 1460b25), it is artistically legitimate. The example he gives of an impossibility that contributes to a narrative is Achilles' gesture of waving off the other Greeks in order to pursue Hector alone in the pursuit-scene. In this scene, Achilles pursues and kills Hector in order to avenge the death of his kinsman Patroclus. The Greek army is present, but Hector is the only Trojan left outside the walls of the city. Achilles shakes his head at the other Greeks as he chases Hector around the walls so that they will let him face Hector alone. Aristotle thinks Achilles' gesture is impossible. He says that the combination of the Greeks standing still and Achilles shaking his head at them would appear ridiculous (γελοῖα, 1460a15) if acted out before

our eyes on stage. It is indeed difficult to see how this would work. We have to imagine Achilles turning back toward the Greeks while he races after Hector, trying to corner him and keep him away from the walls of Troy so that he cannot escape. The other Greeks heroes would naturally pursue Hector, who is now at their mercy in his isolation, so Achilles has to motion to them to let him challenge Hector alone. Only in this way can Homer have the greatest heroes of the Greeks and Trojans, Achilles and Hector, finally decide the fate of Troy, and only in this way can Achilles himself avenge Patroclus. This is the culmination of the war as told in the *Iliad*, and would be anticlimactic if the other Greeks heroes were to overwhelm Hector together. Achilles' gesture adds artistic value to the scene by showing his intention to face Hector alone, resulting in a greater fulfillment of the consequences of Achilles' rage and his love of honor. However, it would be awkward for an actor representing Achilles on stage to both run after Hector and look behind and gesture at the Greeks. Aristotle's defense of Homer's use of this impossibility is that it adds to the beauty of the story without being distracting. Because epic poetry is only recited, not acted out on stage, the impossibility is not immediately apparent. The device works because the action is not presented to our sight, but is only in imagination, so that we do not notice the problem vividly. Aristotle admits that it would be better if there were nothing impossible in the narrative, but justifies Homer by referring to the wonder that results. If it can do this kind of work, wonder is of real value.

I have argued that wonder is the final end of tragedy, and that Aristotle conceives of wonder in two ways, first as puzzlement at an impasse and second as contemplative amazement. If these arguments are sound, then tragedy must contain an impasse with some definite content. Wonder for Aristotle is not a vague wish for knowledge, but either a definite desire for

knowledge that would solve an apparent contradiction, or a contemplative sense of amazement at what is beautiful akin to sense perception. Therefore, to show that tragedy is wondrous in the first sense, I must explain what the content of that impasse is. I will attempt to do so by giving a general formula for tragic impasse. The extant tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides vary greatly, so we might be inclined to think that there can be no general formula that would apply to them all. I will argue however that Aristotle's notion of reversal (περιπέτεια) provides a basis for such a formula. For Aristotle, just as there is a paradigmatic tragic narrative that the various tragedies embody to a greater or lesser extent, so there is a paradigmatic tragic impasse. I will argue that the tragic impasse is that the defining character quality of the tragic hero is both a virtue and a vice. In the next chapter I will show that wonder in the second sense, i.e. contemplative amazement, can develop out of this first kind of wonder.

I will argue for my position by examining the notion of reversal. Reversal is an important element in the paradigm tragic narrative Aristotle outlines in *Poetics* 13, and in *Rhetoric* I.11, in the context of a discussion about what is pleasant, he describes reversal as wondrous (1371b10). The similarity of Aristotle's reasoning in the two texts, and his definition of reversal in terms of opposites (i.e. good and bad fortune), make it a promising avenue by which to uncover the content of tragic impasse. Aristotle's comment in the *Rhetoric* appears in a context touching on the nature of poetry in a way that is reminiscent of *Poetics* 4. He argues that because learning and wonder are pleasant, imitations (including poetry) are pleasant (1371b4-7). He illustrates the connection between imitation and the pleasure of learning the same way here in the *Rhetoric* as he does in the *Poetics*: when observing a drawing or painting, a viewer infers by certain signs that the picture is an imitation of someone or something already known to the viewer (1371b8).

This inference is a rational process that results in learning (μανθάνειν, 1371b10). He also says in the *Rhetoric* that wonder implies the desire to learn (1371a32-33), echoing the passages on wonder in the *Metaphysics*. Therefore, in both the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* he locates the value of poetic imitation in the natural human desire to know.

Before I go on, I should say why I have chosen to approach the issue through reversal rather than discovery, which Aristotle also defines in terms of opposites, namely ignorance and knowledge (1452a29-31), and which plays a role similar to reversal. Aristotle discusses discovery side-by-side with reversal in *Poetics* 10 and 11. The opposites that define reversal relate more directly to the narrative development of a tragedy caused by the hero's ἁμαρτία. It is more difficult to see how the hero's ignorance and knowledge are inherently tied to the essence of tragedy. However, I do not want to rule out the potential of such an approach, which may be complementary to the one I take.

To continue, the connection between what Aristotle says about poetry in the *Rhetoric* and in *Poetics* 4 along with the claim that reversal is wondrous give us a definite basis for establishing the content of wonder in tragedy. In *Poetics* 13 Aristotle defines reversal as a change in action from one opposite to the other, according to what is likely or necessary (1452a22-23). The opposites are good fortune (εὐτυχία and τὸ εὐτυχεῖν) and bad fortune (δυστυχία and τὸ ἀτυχεῖν) (1452a31-32, 1452b2). He gives the reversal in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as an example. In this tragedy the reversal, which is also a discovery, happens when the messenger reveals Oedipus' true origins (1452a24-26). As a result of the revelation of his identity, Oedipus is ruined, and becomes a beggar and an outlaw. He falls from the heights of good fortune as the savior and king of the city, to the misery of a self-condemned outcast. Now,

Aristotle's definition of reversal in terms of the opposites of good and bad fortune suggests that reversal has the power to present an impasse to the audience. An impasse is an apparent contradiction, and the good and bad fortune that define reversal are, as opposites, indications that there is a conflict in the source of the reversal (as I will argue in the next chapter). I suggest that reversal is indicative of a contradiction in the hero's character. The tragic impasse is that the dominant dimension of the tragic hero's character is a source of both success and failure on a large scale. The problem is that the tragedy presents the hero's defining characteristic – the quality that makes him great – as both a virtue inherently productive of happiness and a vice inherently productive of misery.

As a change from good to bad, reversal is not in itself problematic. There is nothing inherently contradictory, and therefore nothing puzzling, in a narrative development in which the hero falls from greatness to ruin. Nonetheless, I believe, reversal indicates a tension in the tragic hero's character. Reversal is an aspect of the narrative arc of a tragedy, and a tragedy as Aristotle defines it is an imitation of one action, so reversal must reflect the hero's character which underlies his or her action. To make my case plausible, I will give a brief reading of a few tragic narratives Aristotle refers to in the *Poetics* in terms of a contradictory character and resultant reversal. First I will consider Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in more detail, then Euripides' *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, and last Homer's *Iliad*. These are Aristotle's primary examples of tragic narratives in the *Poetics*. Aristotle refers to *Oedipus Rex* and *Iphigeneia Among the Taurians* as the best examples of tragedy in *Poetics* 13 and 14 respectively. Both conjoin reversal with discovery, and wonder (ἔκπληξις), he says, follows the discoveries in these narratives, a claim that incidentally implies the wondrous nature of reversal (1455a17). The discovery in *Oedipus*

Rex is Oedipus' realization that he himself is the source of pollution in Thebes because he murdered his father and married his mother; the reversal, which I have already been mentioned, is the fall from kingship to outlawry. The combined reversal and discovery is a result of Oedipus' wisdom and drive for knowledge. Oedipus is known for being wise, and his wisdom is the source of his success. He is king of Thebes because he alone was able to solve the Sphinx's riddle. The riddle asks what walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three in the evening. Oedipus, interpreting morning, noon, and evening as metaphors for infancy, adulthood, and old age, correctly answers that a human being walks in this way. He thus saves Thebes from the scourge of the Sphinx. His solution to the riddle implies a definite kind of knowledge, namely knowledge of human nature.

I suggest that Aristotle would read this tragedy in terms of wisdom. Oedipus is characterized by wisdom and the desire for knowledge. Sophocles' play presupposes this picture of Oedipus as the wise man. In the tragedy itself, he relentlessly searches for the source of pollution in Thebes and then of his own origins, even as he begins to fear what he will find. In Aristotle's eyes, as in the eyes of any educated Greek, he follows the maxim "know thyself." Oedipus acts well in following this maxim. He acts according to his rational human nature, seeking wisdom and self-knowledge, and all his success and greatness is a result of his love of wisdom. At the same time, this drive also destroys him. In seeking to fulfill his nature, he destroys himself. The tragedy is wondrous because Oedipus is noble and enviable for his success, but also horrifying and pitiable. These opposite qualities are a result of the same thing, namely his love of knowledge. This love is the cause of his royal status and his fulfillment of the Delphic maxim. His drive for knowledge fulfills his human nature and is beneficial to both

himself and the city. On the other hand, his love for knowledge ruins him: he fails dramatically by getting the knowledge he seeks. In discovering is true identity as son of Laius and Jocasta, he shows that he is the source of pollution, bringing ruin upon himself. As he finds out, he was the reason for the city's suffering. His killing of Laius and marrying Jocasta makes him king, but it is also the worst kind of crime crime and is the cause of the plague. He saved Thebes from the Sphinx only to bring another plague. Fulfilling his desire to know therefore makes him miserable by lowering him to the status of a beggar and an outlaw. Oedipus' self-imposed blindness is an image of contradiction in his action and character.

The tragedy is wondrous, I suggest, because it raises a problem regarding wisdom. From Aristotle's perspective, and that of the Greeks generally, if wisdom is a virtue, it must be inherently good for the wise person. In *Oedipus Rex*, wisdom also appears to be destructive, since it brings misery on Oedipus. It seems that wisdom is not inherently good. The simultaneous reversal and discovery, which Aristotle claims generate wonder, vividly force the problem upon us in a way that we cannot ignore.

Euripides' *Iphigeneia Among the Taurians* presents a similar issue, this time regarding piety. In this tragedy, after having been separated from the time they were young, Orestes and his sister Iphigeneia are reunited in a place far from their home in Argos. In the version of the myth Euripides uses, Iphigeneia was not in fact sacrificed at Aulis, but was preserved by Artemis to serve her as a priestess among the Taurians. The Taurians are a barbaric people in the eyes of the Greeks, and their custom is to sacrifice any Greeks they encounter to Artemis. In obedience to Apollo, who promises him final relief from the pursuing Furies, Orestes goes to the Taurians. Not recognizing Oedipus, Iphigeneia intends to sacrifice him to Artemis, as she is ordered to do

to all visiting Greeks. However, she desires to send a letter home to Argos with Oedipus' companion Pylades, to whom Iphigeneia reads the letter so that he might commit it to memory. In reading the letter, Iphigeneia reveals her identity to Orestes. The two finally recognize each other as brother and sister, and together devise a way to escape back to Argos. Their recognition of each other is the discovery Aristotle mentions in *Poetics* 16.

The way in which on the one hand Iphigeneia and Orestes are brought together again for the first time in years, but on the other Iphigeneia almost sacrifices Orestes because they do not at first recognize each other, is wondrous. The narrative brings the good and bad fortune in the tragedy side by side, and is an example of a wondrous close call (see *Rhetoric* 1371b10-11). More problematic, and therefore more wondrous, is the way in which piety is presented as close to salvation and destruction. Orestes is almost sacrificed by his own sister only because he piously followed the command of Apollo. Iphigeneia owes her life to Artemis' favor, and piously serves her, but her piety is human sacrifice. She nearly performs the most wicked crime of murdering a family member (the same crime for which Orestes is pursued by the Furies) out of piety. And yet, if Iphigeneia had not intended to sacrifice Orestes, or if Orestes had not gone to a place where he would naturally be sacrificed, neither of the two would have been saved from their suffering. Although Iphigeneia does not in the end kill Orestes, the effect is the same, or nearly the same, as if she were in fact to do so (see *Physics* 197a26-29). The sacrifice is envisioned as a very real possibility, and it is only by good fortune that Iphigeneia and Orestes recognize each other. Piety seems to have the same destructive power as impiety. Furthermore, the Greek audience cannot solve this problem by appeal to an omniscient God who providentially guides events. Athena does intervene at the end to make good Iphigeneia and

Orestes' escape, but her intervention does not amount to a general guarantee of the benefit of piety. As far as we can see from the narrative Euripides gives us, things could have turned out poorly.

The last narrative I will consider is the *Iliad*, which Aristotle addresses in his discussion of the impossible in poetry. Aristotle discusses the pursuit scene in *Poetics* 24 and 25. The value of this scene is not just as an opportunity to argue that the impossible is sometimes justified in poetry. His defense of the impossible is the wonder it makes possible: the pursuit scene is wondrous. I suggest that for Aristotle it is wondrous because it brings to the fore a contradiction in Achilles' character and action as it is narrated in the *Iliad*. The contradiction is in what motivates Achilles to achieve both greatness and success for himself and the Greeks, but also abject misery and failure. Essentially, Achilles' virtue of courage and the honor it aims at is also, while still being a virtue, a vice that brings him and his fellow Greeks misery.

Achilles is characterized by his excellence in battle and his sense of honor, but along with his sense of honor is his rage at those who wrong him. Achilles' rage sets in motion a series of events that put on display his inherently problematic character. The Greeks rely on his skill in battle to ultimately defeat the Trojans, but in book I, because of his rage he withdraws from the battle against the Trojans and invokes divine punishment on the Greeks. His aim is to make the Greeks suffer as they face the Trojans and Hector without him. Realizing that Achilles is no longer fighting, the Trojans take the opportunity to attack the Greeks. They almost defeat the Greek army and put an end to the war by assaulting the ships lying on the beach in book XV. While Achilles nurses his wounded pride in the camp, Patroclus, Achilles' kinsman, sees the damage done to the army. In book XVI he mourns for the Greeks and borrows Achilles' armor

for his own protection and to intimidate the Trojans. He expects that the Trojans will recognize the armor and think that Patroclus is Achilles, and therefore hesitate to face him in battle, thus providing needed support for the other Greeks. During the battle, Hector is deceived along with the other Trojans, and taking Patroclus to be Achilles, fights and kills Patroclus. Achilles discovers that Patroclus has been killed, and then turns his rage against Hector out of his love for Patroclus. Achilles returns to battle, routs the Trojans, and kills Hector in *Iliad* XXII.

The pursuit of Hector, in which the two greatest champions from either side in the war face each other, is the climax of the narrative. Here Achilles avenges Patroclus and ensures that the Greeks will conquer Troy by killing Hector. Achilles' characteristic love of honor and rage when he is not honored as he thinks he should be makes him both noble and miserable, and brings good fortune as well as bad to himself and the Greeks. Because of his anger, he first indirectly harms the main body of the Greek army by allowing Hector to rampage among them unchecked, even though the Greeks are his friends (i.e. those bound together by φιλία). His anger also leads to the death of Patroclus, his closest companion. Achilles is completely miserable at the loss of Patroclus. On the other hand, it is his sense of honor and rage that motivate him to kill Hector. By killing Hector, Achilles not only gets justice for Patroclus, but also glory for himself. His victory over Troy ensures that Troy will fall, though he too will die fighting the Trojans. The single act of avenging himself against the Greeks brings about Patroclus' death and his own misery, as well as his eventual death in the war, but at the same time victory over Hector, Greek victory over Troy, and immortal glory. One action is both success and failure, and one character trait is both a virtue and a vice. This is a contradiction, since a virtue cannot be a vice.

The contradiction is not in the narrative of the *Iliad* or in Homer's characterization of Achilles. Homer's Achilles is not inconsistent, one moment wrathful and the next mild. The problem is not that Achilles is mostly good, with one vice that causes harm, i.e. a "tragic flaw," understood as a natural defect that ruins the hero despite their otherwise virtuous character. Of course from the standpoint of Aristotle's ethics, Achilles is not virtuous. The fact that he stops fighting the opposing army for the sake of his honor shows that he does not value courage as an end in itself, but for excellence to be true excellence, it must be exercised for its own sake (*NE* 1105a32). If he were in fact virtuous, he would exercise courage for its own sake, and not for honor. Although he does not have real virtue, in Aristotle's view he is not therefore vicious. Aristotle could not use the *Iliad* as an example of a tragic narrative if he were, since tragedy cannot be about someone really bad, but must be about someone better than most. One dimension of Achilles' character results in his own success and misery.

Through Achilles' character and his action, Homer presents a thought-provoking problem analogous to the impasses Aristotle speaks of in *Metaphysics* A.2. The problem is that a single action is both success and failure, good and bad fortune. The same feature of his character, namely his sense of honor and inclination to rage when that honor is offended, gives him nobility but also harms those closest to him. What are we to make of Achilles? The *Iliad* does not aim to teach the simple lesson that we must restrain anger from extremes. If Achilles had not been so prone to anger, Patroclus would not have been killed, but then he would not have defeated Hector. On the other hand, he unintentionally makes himself miserable, and dishonorably lets his friends be killed in battle. In the end, he gains the greatest honor, the very thing he aims at, but is deprived of his closest friend and ultimately his life. It seems that he succeeds and fails at

the same time. In Achilles, we see side by side the heights of greatness a Greek warrior can achieve, alongside the deepest misery. This juxtaposition is wondrous, and motivates us to reflect on Achilles' nature.

I do not mean for these readings of Homer, Sophocles, and Euripides to be taken definitively as Aristotle's interpretations. My goal is only to show that Aristotle could plausibly have interpreted them along similar lines, and seen them as wondrous because they each raise a definite intellectual problem. I offer my readings as examples of a way of looking at them that highlights a problem and the philosophical insight it points toward, in order to show that there is plausibility to the claim that for Aristotle they are centered around a wondrous impasse. Aristotle gives us little to work with in his few comments on these narratives, so we are forced to go beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. Furthermore, I do not suppose that I have fully demonstrated that tragedy is wondrous in regard to a contradictory character trait in the tragic hero. I will make that argument more rigorously in the next chapter by starting from tragic reversal.

III. Fear and Pity

Aristotle's account of tragedy in the *Poetics* is better known for its definition of tragedy in terms of catharsis of fear and pity, and for the notion of ἁμαρτία that drives a tragic narrative, than it is for wonder. The catharsis of fear and pity in particular seems to make the function of tragedy primarily emotional rather than intellectual, contrary to my interpretation, and this way of interpreting tragedy is prominent in the literature.[57] In this section, I will argue that fear and

57 Jacob Bernays, *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie* (Breslau: 1857), republished "On Catharsis: From Fundamentals of Aristotle's Lost Essay on the 'Effect of Tragedy,'" trans. Peter Rudnytsky, *American Imago*, vol. 61, no. 3 (2004): 319-341; Lord (*Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle)*; Janko (*Aristotle: Poetics*, xviii-xx); Stephen Halliwell (*The Poetics of Aristotle*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1987)), 90 all interpret catharsis in terms of its effect on the emotions, whether to eliminate fear and pity from the soul (Bernays), or to moderate them (Lord, Janko, and Halliwell).

pity work more directly toward an intellectual end than these interpretations recognize. I will show that fear and pity are each a result of the opposed nature of the tragic hero's character, and that they contribute to contemplation of tragedy by making the opposition in the tragic hero apparent to the audience, rather than making the primary function of tragedy a matter of regulating the emotions. My claim is that fear and pity help to inspire a sense of wonder and thus compel us to think about the character of the hero. (In the next chapter, I will argue that reversal plays a similar role of drawing the audience into the tragic impasse.) I will use the accounts Aristotle gives of fear and pity in the *Rhetoric*, where he defines fear as a pain felt for oneself and pity for someone else, and that they therefore tend to exclude each other. Fear and pity retain this tendency in the *Poetics*, contrary to some contemporary interpretations.[58] In line with my arguments, I will offer an interpretation of catharsis as tragedy's activity of putting emotion to work toward the intellectual end of thinking about the problem the tragedy raises. If my account of the purpose of tragedy is right, then catharsis is "purification" in the sense that it makes use of emotion for the functioning of reason.

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines fear and pity as pains felt in the face of some evil. Fear is "a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future" (1382a21-22).[59] Pity is "pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours" (1385b13-15). Pity works according to an underlying sympathy between the one who feels pity and the one who suffers. Aristotle emphasizes that pity is only for those who are similar to us, and is felt for others only when we think we could suffer in the same way.

58 Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 91, 125-126. Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics*, 101. Sachs, *Aristotle: Poetics*, 5-7.
59 I use W. Rhys Roberts' translation (*The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, (Random House, 1941)).

Accordingly, we pity only those who are like us in "age, character, disposition, social standing, or birth" (1386a25-26), i.e. in some respect that makes us subject to suffering in a similar way. It is felt for suffering that we think can happen to us, and to do so soon (1385b15). We do not feel pity if we think we are immune from suffering. Those who are already completely ruined by suffering, or those who suppose themselves to be beyond all suffering, cannot feel pity, because "no further evil can befall them" (1385b1-20). Fear is similar: we fear only what we think can happen to us, and we do not feel fear when we think we cannot suffer any great evil (1382b29-31). Fear and pity are felt for the same kinds of things, and are only felt when we think that we too are vulnerable to suffering. The two seem to be essentially the same, distinguished only by time, fear being felt toward future suffering, pity for present and past suffering.

The distinction is not so simple. Fear and pity are distinguished not only by time, but also according to whether the evil occurs to ourselves or to others. Aristotle claims that whether we feel the one or the other depends on whether the suffering happens to ourselves or to someone else: "whatever is pitiable when it happens or is going to happen to other people is fearful" (1382b25-26), and "whatever we fear for ourselves, we pity when it happens to others" (1386a27-29).[60] Although we pity only those who are somewhat similar to us, and who are not complete strangers to us, in comparison to fear, pity is felt for others, and fear is for ourselves (or those who are so close to us that they are as it were part of us).

It follows from Aristotle's account that fear and pity tend to exclude each other. In his account of pity, Aristotle claims that people feel pity only when they do not feel great fear, since people who feel pity are concerned with themselves (1385b30-34). People who feel great fear do not at the same time feel pity, because they are concerned with their own welfare, while those

60 My translations.

who feel pity are concerned with someone else's welfare. As an example of someone who felt fear and pity only toward different people, Aristotle refers to Amasis' experience of fear and pity. Amasis, says Aristotle, wept out of pity not when he saw his son led to death, but when he saw his friend begging (1386a20-24). Amasis could not feel pity at the imminent death of his son, whose close relation to Amasis himself produced fear rather than pity. The suffering of the friend evoked pity instead of fear because Amasis naturally identified less closely with the friend than his son. Aristotle uses this example to illustrate the point that what is fearful tends to exclude pity and even to produce the opposite of pity (1386a22-24).

The separation Aristotle posits between fear and pity may seem rather arbitrary. After all, it seems that we do often fear what might happen to others, including those we are not close to, or even know at all. We speak of fearing what may happen to people we have no close relation to without necessarily assuming that what they suffer is likely to happen to us to. Is Aristotle unjustifiably restricting fear to ourselves, as if fear were an inherently selfish emotion? I do not think so. Although we do speak of "fearing for" others, given the typical human capacity for sympathy toward others, there is clearly a difference between how we feel about evils that befall others and those that may befall us. The one may motivate us to assist the sufferer, while the other is a motivation to avoid harm to ourselves. The first falls out of the picture in the case of what Aristotle calls fear, and the feeling of "fearing for" others is what he would call pity. Aristotle is defining these terms technically in the *Rhetoric*, but he is getting at a real distinction.

The definition of tragedy in terms of both emotions in the *Poetics* is striking when read alongside *Rhetoric* II.5 and II.8 and raises the question of how tragedy could make us feel both. Despite the clear distinction between them in the *Rhetoric*, in the *Poetics* Aristotle argues that the

action that gives tragedy its unity must inspire both fear and pity. Obviously we pity the tragic hero when they suffer, but what kind of action could also evoke fear for ourselves? Furthermore, we are somehow supposed to feel both at the same time. It cannot be that tragedy makes us feel fear and pity at different times, because the passage in *Poetics* 9 ties them together with wonder. Aristotle claims that a tragedy should develop paradoxically according to a reversal or discovery (or both) so that it will have fear and pity and thus more wonder. The implication seems to be that fear and pity happen at the same time, along with the reversal or discovery, but if they exclude each other, it is hard to see how they can both be active at the same time. Of course, we should be careful not to overstate the opposition between fear and pity. These are content for ethical thought, which has a limited degree of clarity (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b11-27). Nonetheless, I suggest that we take the conjunction in tragedy of the inherently opposed feelings as symptomatic of something wondrous in tragedy.

The way fear and pity are usually understood in the *Poetics* is not fully adequate to Aristotle's account. What I will call the "conventional" interpretation of fear and pity in the *Poetics* reconciles the opposition between fear and pity as they are defined in the *Rhetoric* by positing an identification on the part of the viewer with the tragic hero. By focusing only on the sympathetic bond between audience and hero, this kind of interpretation in effect reduces fear and pity to pity alone (as Aristotle defines fear and pity). According to this interpretation, given by commentators such as Richard Janko and Stephen Halliwell,[61] fear and pity are both pains felt for the tragic hero. They see fear as fear for the tragic hero as suffering approaches, and pity as

61 Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 91; 125-126. Janko claims that we feel "terror, because we experience their suffering as our own" (*Aristotle: Poetics*, 101). Sachs, *Aristotle: Poetics*, 5-7. Lord on the other hand claims that fear and pity are not the only emotions characteristic of tragedy, and that Aristotle thinks of catharsis as cleansing of a range of emotions not limited to fear and pity alone (*Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, 159-160).

pity for the tragic hero once their suffering has come upon them. They thus distinguish the two emotions by time, and make fear as well as pity be felt for the tragic hero. These commentators recognize that Aristotle argues in the *Rhetoric* that fear and pity are felt for oneself and for someone else respectively, but suggest that in the contemplation of a tragedy the audience engages in an "imaginative" sympathy that makes both fear and pity be felt for the tragic hero.[62] The idea is that when we watch a tragedy, we identify with and feel both fear for the tragic hero because the difference between them and ourselves is overcome in imagination. We put ourselves in their shoes, as it were, and so their suffering is our suffering. The opposition Aristotle finds between fear and pity in the *Rhetoric* is thus undone by sympathy. Furthermore, this interpretation seems to run counter to Aristotle's repeated pairing of fear and pity in relation to tragedy. If the only difference between them is one of time, there is no reason to continuously juxtapose them as he does in the *Poetics* (e.g. 1449b7-8; 1452a1-3; 1452a38-1452b1; 1453b1; 1453b11-13).

By sympathy, these scholars do not mean the mimetic function of art. Aristotle does refer to mimesis with the term "sympathy" in the *Politics* (συμπαθεῖς 1340a13), but his point there is not about a identification with the characters in a work of poetry, it is an explanation as to what mimesis is, namely the production in the soul of what poetry itself imitates. Mimesis a more fundamental notion used to account for the way in which art works on the soul in general than a sympathy that would enable us to fear for the tragic hero. It would allow for sympathy in the

62 Janko implies that sympathy allows for tragedy to have both fear and pity when he claims that we feel "terror, because we experience their suffering as our own" (*Aristotle: Poetics*, 101). Halliwell (*The Poetics of Aristotle*, 91; 125-126) mentions the role of sympathy in producing fear and pity, though he does not explicitly describe fear as fear for the hero. Sachs (*Aristotle: Poetics*, 6) claims that tragedy can have both fear and pity because "our imaginations seem able to erase the boundary between ourselves and another."

sense of a psychological identification to be possible whenever there is such an identification, but it is not in itself that kind of identification.

The sympathy posited between the audience and the hero is a sympathy arising out of similarity between the two. The conventional interpretation finds textual support in the similarity Aristotle posits between ourselves and the hero in the claim in *Poetics* 13 that the hero ought to be "like us" (1453a5). Aristotle argues in *Poetics* 13 that only certain kinds of narratives are suitable for tragedy, and this similarity is one of the prerequisites for the best form of tragedy, because it lets us feel fear. He argues that a tragedy should not show good men (ἐπιεικεῖς ἄνδρας) going from good fortune to bad (1452b34-35), a bad character going from bad fortune to good (1452b36-37), or a bad character going from good fortune to bad (1453a1-2), because none of these patterns of change has either fear or pity. These narratives fail to have fear and therefore fail to be tragic, says Aristotle, unless the tragic hero is "like us." Aristotle draws the conclusion that the best kind of tragedy imitates a good but not outstandingly good person going from good fortune to bad.

It is not as clear that Aristotle means that fear is primarily our fear for the hero as this line of thinking suggests. What Aristotle says is that fear is περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον (*Poetics* 1453a5,6). Sachs translates this phrase as "for one like us," Janko as "for a person like [ourselves]," Halliwell as "towards one like ourselves."[63] They translate the preposition περί, the normal sense of which is is "about" or "concerning," as "for," suggesting that Aristotle means to say that we fear for the hero out of a sympathetic identification. We should hesitate before concluding that fear being περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον entails sympathetic identification. Likeness is not sympathy, and there is no explicit appeal to sympathy anywhere in the *Poetics*. The text does not determine

63 Sachs, *Aristotle: Poetics*, 37; Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics*, 16; Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, 44.

whether Aristotle means that fear is for the hero or, as I suggest, fear of the hero. It is obvious that pity is for the tragic hero, but Aristotle does not explicitly state that we feel fear for the tragic hero, nor that we identify with the tragic hero because of an imaginative sympathy.

The conventional interpretation is not wrong to point out that we sympathize and identify with the tragic hero. This kind of sympathy is undeniably part of Aristotle's account of pity in the *Rhetoric* and is part of our experience of tragedy. We do in some sense "fear for" the tragic hero, and this "fearing for" implies sympathetic identification. The necessity of this likeness and sympathy is supposed to account for why Aristotle finds some narratives to be non-tragic. The claim is that excessive goodness or badness of the would-be tragic hero prevents us from having sympathy for them. We cannot fear for someone who is outstandingly good or outstandingly bad, because such people are not like us.[64] On the other hand, we identify with someone who is imperfect but still good. Such a person is also undeserving of their suffering, and therefore the proper subject of a tragic narrative. Nonetheless, an interpretation that focuses primarily on sympathy of this kind contradicts the definition of fear found in the *Rhetoric*, and its textual basis is weaker than it seems at first glance.

There are other problems with the conventional interpretation besides the lack of definite textual support. The interpretation also separates fear and pity from the action tragedy imitates, which, given the importance of action on Aristotle's account, is a severe shortcoming. Action is central to Aristotle's account of tragedy. He claims that a tragedy is an imitation of one action, i.e. the tragic hero's action that gives the tragedy its content. He claims in chapter 9 that fear and pity emerge out of the way the story (μῦθος) unfolds when it is constructed in the proper way, and the story is the organization of action (1450a4-5) and the "soul of the tragedy" (1450a38-39).

64 Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics*, 100.

In *Poetics* 13, Aristotle argues that a tragedy should develop because of some ἁμαρτία, and ἁμαρτία – whatever kind of mistake or error it is – is not merely something suffered, but is something the hero does, and helps us to define tragedy. In order to produce fear and pity, the tragic hero must act with ἁμαρτία, because ἁμαρτία is the cause of fear and pity. Aristotle claims that tragedy must imitate what is fearful and pitiable (1452b30-33). On this basis he excludes the various non-tragic narratives, and then introduces the idea of ἁμαρτία. This shows that ἁμαρτία is somehow the source of fear and pity, and given that it is some kind of action, action is at the heart of tragedy. To the extent that ἁμαρτία entails action, tragedy as a whole revolves around action, and the conjunction of fear and pity in it result from action. In *Poetics* 14, Aristotle reinforces the connection of fear and pity to the story, when he claims that fear and pity arise from the "organization of the actions" so that someone who only hears the actions done without seeing them performed will feel fear and pity (1453b1-7). Fear and pity ought to be "embodied in the actions" (1453b11-14) so that the audience feels the pleasure characteristic of tragedy. Moreover, all of the examples of tragedies or tragic narratives Aristotle refers to are about someone who acts, bringing about their suffering through their own agency. Oedipus discovers what he has done by actively seeking out the cause of the pollution and his own identity; Orestes and Iphigeneia recognize each other because Orestes travels to the Taurians and Iphigeneia carries out her duties as priestess; Achilles fights and kills Hector in order to avenge Patroclus. Even Achilles' withdrawal from battle at the beginning of the *Iliad*, which is in a sense a refusal to act, is a way of avenging himself against the Greeks. In none of these is the hero entirely passive.

The problem is that on the conventional interpretation tragic emotion could occur without the action central to tragedy on Aristotle's account. If fear and pity in tragedy are only fear and pity for the hero, there is no need for tragedy to be about action at all. We can feel fear and pity at an imitation of someone who suffers undeservingly, and who has no agency in bringing about their suffering, but suffers only as a result of circumstances entirely outside of their control. If tragic fear is only fear for the hero, then in principle a drama about suffering alone and in no significant way about action would be legitimate material for a tragedy. Pity does not have an inherent connection to action: pity is felt for evil suffered. A narrative in which the hero does not exercise meaningful agency fails to be a tragedy according to Aristotle's account. Of course, those who articulate the conventional interpretation are aware that Aristotle defines tragedy as an imitation of action and not suffering alone. Their interpretation of fear and pity does not exclude action from tragedy. But a fully adequate interpretation of fear and pity ought to show how they are inherently connected to action, not only because tragedy is about action, but because Aristotle explicitly ties fear and pity to action in *Poetics* 13 with his argument for ἁμαρτία. That the conventional interpretation does not do so suggests that we ought to find a more adequate understanding of tragic emotion. I will explain below how the connection between tragic emotion and action becomes much clearer if we take Aristotle's tragic fear to be primarily fear of the hero.

There is another problem that drives a wedge between the tragic hero's likeness to us, which is the basis for the conventional interpretation of fear and pity, and sympathetic identification. The conventional interpretation's assumption that the key to tragic emotion is identification with the hero is not consistent with Aristotle's argument in *Poetics* 13 that the

narrative of a good person going from good to bad fortune is not tragic. This narrative pattern "is neither frightening nor pitiable but repellent" (οὐ γὰρ φοβερὸν οὐδὲ ἐλεεινὸν τοῦτο ἀλλὰ μιαρόν ἐστιν, 1452b35-36). The claim is that when a truly virtuous person (not just someone better than people are now (1448a17-18) as Aristotle describes the proper tragic hero, but someone really virtuous) suffers great misfortune, a feeling of repulsion (i.e. what is μιαρός) replaces fear and pity. What is μιαρός is defiled, polluted, or "repellent" in a moral and even a religious sense. To be truly good and without any fault or weakness is to be blameless and undeserving of suffering. Aristotle's point is that a narrative about the misfortune of such a character produces excessive pain. What is "repellent" is certainly painful, and it is pain at undeserved suffering, so it seems that the emotion active in this kind of narrative is an excessively painful pity. But unlike a properly tragic narrative, a story that follows this pattern would imitate only suffering, and would have nothing pleasant in it. There is pain at such a story, as there should be in tragedy, but the pain is not that of properly tragic fear and pity, which are also somehow pleasant (1453b11-13). What is μιαρός is so painful that we have no desire to see it. While there is excessive pity, there is no fear in this tragedy (1452b35-36).

According to the conventional interpretation, the reason why this kind of narrative about the suffering of the virtuous character does not have fear or properly tragic pity is that someone who is genuinely good is in that respect not like us, so that we cannot identify or sympathize with them. Fear is for someone like us, says Aristotle, but according to this view, we are not like someone outstandingly virtuous because most people are simply not outstandingly virtuous. Therefore, by Aristotle's account of fear, we cannot fear for someone who is outstandingly good. We cannot sympathize or identify with them. But Aristotle clearly thinks that we do suffer with

the hero of such a story, because the repulsion he claims we feel at the suffering of a completely virtuous character is a kind of excessive and unmitigated pain. If sympathetic identification is suffering with the one for whom we have it, we feel pain at the suffering of the virtuous hero only because we do have sympathy for them. A narrative about the suffering of someone genuinely good could not be painful to us unless we identify with them. If we did not sympathize with the hero, there would be no pain, and the narrative could not be described as "repellent." Aristotle says that what is most piteous is the suffering of someone who is noble (σπουδαίους), because they are innocent. Their innocence "makes their misfortunes seem close to ourselves," thus fulfilling one of the necessary conditions for the experience of pity (*Rhetoric* 1386b4-7). Outstanding virtue does not constitute a barrier to sympathy. If anything, it seems we have all the more sympathy and therefore fear and pity for them the more virtuous they are. On the conventional interpretation, our response ought to be indifference, because it is assumed that we do not identify with the sufferer of those narratives Aristotle excludes from tragedy. But clearly in Aristotle's account we do not find indifference in this case. We have sympathy for the sufferer, but according to Aristotle, the sufferer is not like us, which cannot be the case if likeness to us is equivalent to sympathetic identification. It seems that for Aristotle sympathy is not the sole root of tragic emotion, especially of fear.

I do not deny that sympathy plays an important role in Aristotle's account of fear and pity. It is certainly a part of pity as Aristotle defines it in the *Rhetoric*. We have to see ourselves as like the one we see suffer, i.e. we have to identify with the one who suffers, if we are to pity them. Furthermore, the pity we feel for the tragic hero entails a kind of fear for them. Naturally, as we anticipate the suffering of someone we sympathize with, we have what we would call fear.

Nonetheless, this fear – fear for someone else who suffers – does not seem to be what Aristotle has in mind in the *Poetics* any more than in the *Rhetoric*, as is shown by the problems I raised above. In the *Rhetoric*, sympathy does not play the role in his account of fear as it does of pity, because fear is essentially for oneself or those thought of as parts of oneself, as in Aristotle's example of the fear Amasis has for his son. Sympathy is an identification of two different people, but in fear there is no difference, because it is felt for oneself. The conventional interpretation's appeal to sympathy as the means of overcoming the separation therefore limits tragic emotion to pity alone. At any rate, it does not account for tragic fear.

Picking up on Sachs' note,[65] I suggest that we think of tragic fear less as fear *for* the suffering of the hero, and more as fear *of* the hero and their terrible deeds. Understood this way, fear is fear for ourselves in the face of the terrible deeds the tragic hero performs, while pity is for the suffering of the hero that they bring upon themselves. Besides making the *Poetics* consistent with the *Rhetoric*, this reading resonates with tragic narratives like *Oedipus Rex* and the *Iliad*, and offers a more adequate interpretation of Aristotle's account of tragic emotion. Achilles' wrath and the destruction he brings against the Trojans and Hector, and the impetuousness with which Oedipus discovers his crime as well as the crime itself, are terrible. Achilles' wrath, demonstrated vividly in his rampage against the Trojans, during which he even dares to fight a god, naturally inspires awe. Oedipus inspires fear with his relentlessness in finding the source of the pollution. The fear is not just in fearing *for* Achilles and Oedipus (though this kind of fear is present too), but fearing them and their deeds. As Aristotle notes, the tragic hero's deeds are "terrible" (δεινά, *Poetics* 1453a22; 1453b30). Of course the viewer does not take Achilles to be a living individual who might leave the stage and turn his anger against

65 Sachs, *Aristotle: Poetics*, 17-18. I take the point to be more important than Sachs does.

them. The narrative causes fear of the hero in the same way it causes any other emotion, i.e. by virtue of the imitative nature of art.

This way of reading the *Poetics* is better than the conventional interpretation because it is consistent with the definitions of fear and pity that Aristotle gives in the *Rhetoric*. It does not reduce tragic fear and pity to pity as he defines it in the *Rhetoric*, but explains why Aristotle would again and again conjoin fear and pity in the *Poetics*. This reading also makes better sense of how fear and pity relate to action. If tragic fear is fear of the hero, it is fear of what the hero does. Therefore, when Aristotle says tragedy must have fear, he refers the emotional dimension of tragedy to the action it narrates. My reading thus joins tragic emotion to the action that is at the heart of tragedy.

Understood this way, fear and pity are differentiated by the objects for which they are felt and are naturally opposed, just as Aristotle presents them in the *Rhetoric*, but contrary to the claim in the *Rhetoric*, in the case of tragedy the two are felt at the same time. How can we feel both at the same time if they exclude each other? It may seem as if I am making the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* consistent by sacrificing internal consistency in the *Poetics*. However, the opposition between the two emotions is not absolute. Fear and pity tend to exclude each other, but again practical philosophy has a limited degree of precision because of the nature of its object, namely human nature and action, so we should not be surprised if under the right conditions they in fact coincide. The nature of poetic imitation seems to be at play here as well. Imitation makes fear and pity work differently than they otherwise would because an imitation is not what it represents. When the source of emotions is a work of imitation, we do not treat them the same as we otherwise would. We do not run away when we see Achilles rampaging against

the Trojans because poetry is only imitation. Amasis was overwhelmed more by the pain of the death of his son than the suffering of a friend, and so felt fear rather than pity, but the suffering he witnessed was not an artistic representation. This is not to say that the emotions in a tragedy or any work of art are not real. Fear and pity and retain the same definitions in the *Poetics* that they have in the *Rhetoric*. The fear and pity inspired by tragedy are not merely illusions, as if the audience were deceived into thinking they feel fear and pity. Art certainly, at least for Aristotle, generates real emotion. Poetry has to because it is an imitation, and an imitation is what it imitates, though only as an imitation and so at a lower ontological level.

I suggest Aristotle makes fear and pity central to his account of tragedy because the opposition between them helps to provoke wonder. Fear and pity reflect the two opposing sides of the tragic hero's character, and in this way make us more aware of the impasse presented by the tragic hero. In tragedy, fear is pain of the tragic hero as a source of danger to ourselves, and this fear reflects the destructive side of the hero's character. Pity is pain for the tragic hero as a source of danger to themselves, and reflects the noble side of the hero's character insofar as it assumes that the hero is good and not deserving of their suffering. When we feel both, we are naturally aware to some extent of the paradoxical nature of the hero. What this means is that fear and pity make us aware of the impasse in the tragic hero. Because they are powerful emotions, they make the problem vivid in our imaginations and almost force the issue upon us. The natural result is that we inquire into the source of these emotions, which is to inquire into the nature of the tragic hero and to reflect on the impasse the hero presents.

If this line of thinking is right, it becomes clear not only why tragedy must have fear and pity, but why it must have them even though they are at odds with each other. The combination

of the two emotions in tragedy is essential to how tragedy functions so as to generate contemplation. Fear of the tragic hero's terrible deeds would not alone compel us to give so much thought to tragedy, nor would pity at suffering. Together they arouse wonder at the tragic hero by making the two-sided nature of the tragic hero's character vivid to the viewer, motivating reflection on the narrative and the problematic character of the tragic hero. I have suggested that for Aristotle wonder in tragedy imitates wonder in the *Metaphysics* by motivating us to look for a solution to an impasse. It turns out that wonder in tragedy fits this paradigm when we see that fear and pity work together to help us think about the hero.

The *Iliad* and *Oedipus Rex* can reasonably be read in a way that supports my interpretation, with fear and pity together contributing to wonder by highlighting the contradictory sides of the hero. The same quality of wrath makes Achilles both fearful to us and an object of our pity, putting us in a paradoxical relation to him as a potential source of great harm to us, but also a victim whose suffering we sympathize with. Our relation to Oedipus is similar. We fear him because he has committed terrible crimes and relentlessly pursues knowledge no matter the cost, but we also pity him because he is the primary victim of his determination to know his true identity. His pursuit of knowledge is noble, and something to be admired. He is therefore not deserving of his suffering, and so we fear him and pity him at the same time. In both these examples, the combination of fear and pity is thought-provoking. Fear is due to the awareness that Achilles and Oedipus are sources of danger to others, while pity is due to the awareness that they are sources of danger to themselves. Achilles and Oedipus are simultaneously noble and therefore pitiable in their suffering, but also a cause of great suffering to others. The fear and pity we experience together highlight this tension. If we feel both these

emotions strongly, we are confronted with the fact that their characters are ambivalent as great sources of harm and benefit to themselves and their friends. Fear and pity thus contribute to how tragedy functions by reflecting the opposition inherent to the character of the tragic hero, making the opposition clear to the viewer and thereby motivating the viewer to think about the action and the character of the hero.

Why then does Aristotle claim that the hero must be like us, if not so that we identify with and fear for the hero? On my interpretation, when Aristotle claims that there is fear only when the tragic hero is "like us," rather than suggesting that we identify with the hero in the properly tragic narrative, he only means that the tragic hero is like us in being less than outstandingly excellent. This is indicated first by the fact that immediately after arguing that the tragic hero must be undeserving of suffering so that the tragedy will have pity, and like us so that it will have fear, he goes on to argue that the tragic hero must have a certain moral status. The hero must be subject to ἁμαρτία. The argument of the whole of *Poetics* 13 is that a tragedy has what is fearful and pitiable in the way characteristic of tragedy only when it imitates the action of someone who is neither completely virtuous nor thoroughly vicious, because only such a narrative can have both fear and pity. Aristotle's claim is that the hero must be morally like us, neither completely good nor completely bad, in order to be susceptible to ἁμαρτία. By "us" he presumably has in mind an educated audience to whom his *Poetics* would be addressed. Given that full practical and intellectual virtue are both very rare, his audience is composed mostly of those who do not possess full practical or intellectual virtue. In *Poetics* 2 Aristotle defines tragedy as an imitation of someone "better than we are" (1448a4) and "better than people are now" (1448a16-18). But he qualifies this claim in chapter 13 when he defines tragedy no longer in terms of someone who

is simply good (σπουδαῖος). Though still better than average, the tragic hero is like "us" insofar as they are not at either extreme of goodness or badness. The tragic hero is someone great who fails to act in the best way, so that their action brings about their own misery. Tragedy has what is fearful only because the hero is capable of failing to achieve the ultimate end of happiness, not out of vice but of ἁμαρτία. The sense in which the hero is like us does not establish an imaginative identification with the hero, but instead puts the tragic hero on the same plane of fallibility as Aristotle's audience. The whole chapter is oriented not toward establishing the necessity of sympathy for the hero regardless of whether our sympathy is well-placed or not. That is the proper concern of the *Rhetoric*, where the issue is one of persuasion, which is relative to the beliefs of the orator's audience. The concern of *Poetics* 13 is the hero's actual moral standing. Aristotle's requirements for pity, that the suffering be undeserved, is a demand that the hero be good. But Aristotle is careful to qualify the hero's goodness: the hero should be neither fully virtuous, nor vicious, but between these extremes (1453a7). Pity and fear reflect the two sides of the hero's in-between status: pity resulting from the hero's goodness, and fear from his or her imperfection.

This is a good point to make a note on the nature of catharsis. My interpretation of wonder in Aristotle's account of tragedy elucidates Aristotle's puzzling claim that tragedy brings about catharsis of fear and pity by producing fear and pity (1449b27-28). Fear and pity are emotions, and do not in themselves motivate an intellectual activity. However, their conjunction is thought provoking, as I have just argued, and so together they help to bring about reflection. From Aristotle's point of view the transition of the soul from a purely emotive state to one that also involves thought could be described normatively as a purification (i.e. catharsis), because

the emotions of fear and pity are not for their own sake and are each painful, while the use of reason is for its own sake and somehow pleasant. Aristotle claims that tragedy is pleasant, specifically because it has fear and pity (1453b11-14). This is surprising, because fear and pity are both defined as pains. The pleasure of fear and pity in tragedy can be explained by seeing how they contribute to contemplation. If tragedy works to motivate wonder and contemplation, then fear and pity are made pleasant by the intellectual activity of contemplation, because contemplation is naturally pleasant. Reflection on the character of the tragic hero is pleasant, and moves our reaction to tragedy from a strictly emotional response to one that is also philosophical. I suggest that we think of catharsis as tragedy's activity of putting fear and pity to work toward the intellectual activity of reflecting on the tragic hero's character. Catharsis thus involves the transformation of fear and pity into elements in an intellectual activity.

Despite their purification, fear and pity are still present in contemplation of tragedy because the content of a tragedy is fearful and pitiable. Fear and pity are not merely means to the end of contemplation, which cease to exist when the viewer begins to engage the tragedy in a more philosophical mode, rather than passively experiencing the tragedy. Our contemplation of a tragedy is contemplation of what is fearful and pitiable, and since art works by imitation, fear and pity will still be present in us when we contemplate the tragedy. Fear and pity are transformed, not eliminated, as Bernays argues. Catharsis is not the complete elimination of fear and pity, because contemplation of the tragedy and the tragic hero is sustained by fear and pity to the extent that they make us wonder at the hero, and wonder sustains contemplation. Nor is catharsis moral education of fear and pity, as Janko, Halliwell, and Lord argue. It is instead tragedy's putting them to work toward an intellectual end.

I agree with Leon Golden that catharsis is intellectual rather than purely emotional. Golden shows that catharsis cannot be "purgation" of fear and pity, as Bernays argued. From a textual standpoint, Bernays' argument is flawed. Bernays refers to the *Politics* to make his argument.[66] Aristotle says in the *Politics* that some people are restored from frenzy by certain melodies, as if by medicine or catharsis (1342a8-11). However, as Golden points out, the context here is not about the highest use of music, namely leisure.[67] Golden argues for an interpretation of catharsis as "intellectual clarification"[68] on the basis of *Poetics* 1448b9-19, where Aristotle claims that imitation is by nature pleasant because it is part of learning. The *Poetics* addresses the essence of tragedy as a work of imitation, and music is for leisure (18-20). The passage in the *Politics* is therefore relevant only to secondary purposes of music, and can tell us nothing about the catharsis in the *Poetics*. If the essence of imitation is to prompt an intellectual activity, and if the *Poetics* is about the essential function of music while the passage in the *Politics* is on a secondary use of music, then catharsis must somehow be intellectual. As Golden points out, the precedent for an intellectual sense of "catharsis" is found in Plato's *Sophist*. The Eleatic Visitor distinguishes between catharsis of the body and catharsis of the soul (227c-d), and defines Socratic elenchus as one kind of catharsis of the soul, removing the pollution of ignorance by removing an opposition between different beliefs (230c-d) (1992, 22-26).

In contrast to Golden, though not necessarily in disagreement, I have emphasized the beginning of inquiry, where there is puzzlement rather than knowledge. Golden has knowledge in mind when he speaks of intellectual clarification. He is right to suppose that there must be some definite content at which thought arrives, while also being rich enough to sustain

66 Bernays, "On Catharsis," 324ff..
67 Leon Golden, *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, (Atlanta: American Philological Association, 1992), 7-14.
68 Ibid., 26.

contemplation. He suggests that the knowledge catharsis gives is a universalization of human experiences exhibited in tragedy,[69] and knowledge of "the cause, nature, and effect of fear and pity".[70] This seems to me to be too indefinite. Golden does not find an argument in tragedy, whereas I will argue that tragedy contributes a premise to an argument. The premise is that the goods of fortune are inherently unstable. If they can be lost as unexpectedly, suddenly, and completely as Oedipus loses them, then they are not stable. I will argue that Aristotle believes that the audience will see happiness as stable. It follows that happiness is not good fortune. To explain how Aristotle could see tragedy working this way, I will have to show that tragedy provokes reflection by offering an impasse, which I will do in the next chapter.

69 Ibid., 27.
70 Ibid., 31.

CHAPTER 3

An impasse seems to be lurking in the tragic hero's character. Every tragic hero has some character quality that makes them capable of great good, but also of great harm. Oedipus' drive for knowledge enables him to solve the Sphinx's riddle and thereby become king as well as to save Thebes from the plague caused by the Sphinx, but that same drive ruins him by unveiling his crimes. Achilles' love of honor, exhibited in his courage and wrath, leads to Patroclus' death and his own, while also bringing him the immortality of glory. Iphigeneia's service to Artemis by human sacrifice nearly results in her sacrifice of Orestes, her brother, but is also a condition for their mutual recognition. There is an impasse in each of these narratives of the kind Aristotle discusses in *Metaphysics* A.2, a sort of puzzlement that causes wonder.

So far, I have given brief readings of each of these narratives in terms of an impasse. In this chapter I will argue that tragedy raises this problem through tragic reversal. In the *Poetics* Aristotle defines reversal as a sudden change in the narrative from one opposite to another, namely good and bad fortune (1452a22-23). Reversal is one quality that makes for the best kind of tragic narrative, the other quality being discovery (1452a12-18). Furthermore, Aristotle claims in the *Rhetoric* that reversal is wondrous (1371b10). In this passage he argues that imitation is pleasant because learning is pleasant (1371b4-10) in a way reminiscent of his account of the natural causes of poetry in *Poetics* 4. By "wonder" (τὸ θαυμάζειν, *Rhetoric* 1371a31) Aristotle has in mind an impasse, because it is the wonder that contains the desire to

learn (1371a32-33). The wonder that arises out of the puzzles in *Metaphysics* A.2 inspires a desire to learn, and so the wonder in this passage of the *Rhetoric* is essentially aporetic wonder. Read in the light of the argument that the best tragedies feature a reversal of this sort, the comment in the *Rhetoric* implies that the best tragedies are wondrous because of their reversals.

Because reversal is an essential part of how I interpret tragedy, while reversal is defined in terms of good and bad fortune, I will also argue that the poet can make use of fortune in the narrative without undermining the inherent unity of tragedy. Since good and bad fortune play an important role in this way, I will show that fortune is not incompatible with the primacy of action on Aristotle's account, contrary to Halliwell's interpretation.[71] I will argue that chance is essential to a tragic narrative even though it is external to the agent. Fortune is subordinate to the action of a tragedy, but nonetheless plays a positive role in helping to reveal a contradiction in the hero's character.

I will begin this chapter by arguing that the reversal in a tragic narrative makes the audience aware of the problem in the hero's character by sharply juxtaposing the hero's good and bad fortune. The reversal forces the audience to face the problem that the hero's virtue is a vice. The contradiction is not in the reversal itself or the good and bad fortune that define reversal, since there is nothing inherently contradictory about reversal simply considered as a kind of change in the action. However, by its suddenness reversal plays the crucial role of indicating for the audience that there is what appears to be a contradiction. Reversal can do this because it is not just a change of any sort, but a sudden turning-around in the narrative that places good and bad fortune side-by-side in the minds of the audience. The audience cannot help but be struck by the drastic change from good to bad fortune, and are forced to consider how such an abrupt

71 Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 146.

change could occur. Because it is so striking, reversal directs the audience inward from the surface narrative of a tragedy to the underlying source of the action, namely, the character of the hero that led to the action. The audience should thus see that one character quality is the cause of evil just as much as it is of good, and so appears to the audience to be just as much a vice as a virtue.

In the second part of the chapter, I will argue that the insight the audience is to come to is that happiness is distinct from good fortune, and that happiness is instead something internal to the soul. I will show that Aristotle takes for granted that the audience will assume that happiness is stable, and will therefore be in a position to infer from watching tragedy that happiness is not fortune or the goods that come through fortune, which are inherently unstable. This insight has practical and contemplative value against the Homeric background that informs the classical Greek mind. Homer is ambiguous regarding whether virtue and happiness are internal to the soul or are some kind of external success – in other words, whether they are moral qualities. For Aristotle tragedy helps the audience to see that virtue and happiness belong to an inner sphere of human life, and therefore are moral. This insight solves the problem regarding the hero's character. Because the hero is happy only by possessing external goods, and becomes miserable when these are lost, while real happiness is stable, the hero was never really happy in the first place. Once the audience sees this, they have no more reason to think the hero was ever really virtuous. The hero only appeared to be virtuous because of his or her external success. The hero will accordingly no longer appear to be both virtuous and vicious once the audience sees the nature of the internal cause of the hero's good and bad fortune. Being neither good nor bad in itself, it has the potential to cause both good and bad when in the right circumstances. The

wonder of the impasse in tragedy therefore leads to a solution analogous to the solutions to the impasses in the *Metaphysics*.

Besides solving the impasse, the insight into the moral nature of virtue and happiness contributes to the virtue of the city by encouraging the citizens to search for happiness in something other than wealth or honor, excessive competition for which does great harm to the city. Moreover, the insight has a contemplative dimension insofar as it is an insight into the nature of human happiness that is sought for its own sake. The insight preserves the aporetic wonder of the tragic narratives in another form to the extent that it manifests the stable, underlying cause of action and its effects in all the diversity of its consequences. The narratives are therefore also wondrous in the sense that Aristotle uses the term to describe the unmoved mover in *Metaphysics* Λ.7 (*Met.* 1072b24-26).

I. Reversal and Action

I have proposed to uncover the content of the tragic impasse by considering the nature of reversal in Aristotle's account. The textual basis for this proposal is Aristotle's claim in the *Rhetoric* that reversal is wondrous (1371b10). He claims that reversal is pleasant, and the explanation he gives as to why reversal is pleasant shows that he thinks reversal causes the kind of wonder that belongs to puzzlement at an apparent contradiction. Reversal, he says, is pleasant because it is wondrous (1371b10-12). The act of wondering contains the desire to learn, and so what is wondered at is an object of the desire to learn (ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῷ θαυμάζειν τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν μαθεῖν ἐστιν, ὥστε τὸ θαυμαστὸν ἐπιθυμητόν, 1371a32-33). As a desire to learn that aims at what is naturally pleasant, wonder is itself pleasant (1371a31). Furthermore, imitation in its various forms (including γραφικὴ, ἀνδριαντοποιία, and ποιητική) is pleasant because learning

and wondering are pleasant. An imitation is pleasant even when what is imitated is not pleasant, because the viewer does not take pleasure in the thing itself, but in reasoning (συλλογισμός) that the imitation is an imitation of some other thing in particular (1371b4-10). The viewer does not simply look at the imitation in an act of contemplation, but actively seeks to gain a new insight about the nature of the imitation. The wonder in this experience is a stimulus to learning, and given that learning is pleasant, wonder is as well, since it involves the desire to learn. Because it motivates an intellectual movement toward knowledge, wonder in this passage of the *Rhetoric* is the kind of wonder that moves us to seek knowledge. Aristotle does not explain it in terms of a contradiction as he does in *Metaphysics* A.2, but he ascribes essentially the same power to wonder here in the *Rhetoric*. The distinct feature of wonder in this passage of the *Rhetoric* is the impetus it gives to learning, deriving its power from the innate human desire to know.

Aristotle reasons in a similar way in his account of the natural cause of tragedy as a form of imitation in the *Poetics*. Tragedy is a form of imitation, and imitation comes into being because of the natural pleasure of learning, which is pleasant not only to philosophers, but to everyone. This desire to learn is inspired even by imitations of things that are themselves unpleasant to look at, such as corpses (1448b4-14). Echoing the passage in the *Rhetoric*, he claims that people enjoy reasoning out (συλλογίζεσθαι) that an imitation is a representation of someone in particular (1448b15-17). While there is no mention of wonder in this passage of the *Poetics* as there is in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle clearly has in mind the same phenomenon of seeing an imitation and desiring knowledge as a result of human nature. Imitation naturally causes the viewer to seek knowledge, and does so by inspiring wonder, as he explains in the *Rhetoric* passage.

The *Rhetoric* passage is valuable for our understanding of tragedy because reversal is a key element of the best tragedies, which for Aristotle work as a standard by which to judge tragedy in general. He claims in *Poetics* 6 that tragedy leads the soul above all through reversal and discovery (1450a33-35). Reversal is most proper to tragic action, he says in *Poetics* 11 (1452a36-1452b3). It is an essential feature of the complex narrative he discusses in *Poetics* 13, giving a context to the notion of tragic ἁμαρτία.

Reversal points the audience toward what I call tragic impasse. Reversal is part of the narrative development, but a narrative is not problematic just by virtue of the fact that the hero's fortunes change, even if the change is from one extreme to the other. Nonetheless, Aristotle's definition of reversal as a change from one opposite to another gives reversal a form that manifests an underlying problem. I propose that, as Aristotle defines it, reversal indicates an underlying tension in the narrative action, and ultimately in the even more fundamental character of the hero, by its suddenness. Reversal is not a simple motion from good to bad, it is a complex turning-around from good to bad, as in *Oedipus Rex*. Things seem to be going well until the moment the messenger suddenly reveals Oedipus' identity (1452a24-26). The change is jarring, arresting the audience's attention. Aristotle does not call the fall into bad fortune "motion" or "change" (μεταβολή or κίνησις), but "reversal" (περιπέτεια), i.e. a turning-around that happens all at once. In contrast to a gradual change, reversal is a sudden change that places good and bad fortune next to each other, presenting them to the audience simultaneously.

As I understand Aristotle, by speaking of reversal rather than just change, what makes reversal contribute to tragedy is its forceful juxtaposition of opposites. An attentive audience cannot miss the contrast between Oedipus' greatness and his ruin, and must ask how the reversal

occurs. The audience cannot be content to passively observe what Oedipus does, his interaction with other characters, and his ruin, but must ask why he acts as he does, and why he suffers. These questions are especially pressing in a tragedy that contrasts the nobility of Oedipus' search for the source of pollution with his sudden recognition that he himself is its true cause. On the one hand his suffering is undeserved, but on the other it is a just punishment for his own action, however inadvertent. Why else does he suffer so profoundly? Aristotle's view, I suggest, is that the suddenness of reversal acts as a sign for the audience, indicating that the cause of the violent change in the hero's action is the hero's character, because tragedy is about action, and the source of action is in the tragic hero's character.

I will now consider the examples of reversal Aristotle offers in order to illustrate its power. An analysis of these examples will help us to see how reversal sets the opposites of good and bad fortune side-by-side, inspiring the audience to locate the source of the problem in the hero. I will first expand on the example of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. This work offers an example of a simultaneous reversal and discovery, each of which is most tragic when together with the other (1452a36-1452b3). The reversal comes about through the unforeseen revelation of Oedipus' identity by two old shepherds. The first shepherd reveals that Oedipus is not the son of the king and queen of Corinth, as he had thought. At this point in the drama, Oedipus has come to fear that he does not know who his parents really are and therefore who he himself is. The shepherd, who brings the message of Polybus' death and the news that Oedipus was adopted by Polybus as an infant, means to relieve Oedipus of his fear; instead, he does the opposite: he fulfills Oedipus' fear. (As Sachs notes, the verbs Aristotle uses here are aorists, implying sudden action.[72]) Oedipus then forces the second shepherd, a slave still in the royal household who long

72 Sachs, *Aristotle: Poetics*, 34.

ago had saved the infant Oedipus from death, to reveal what he knows. This shepherd explains what he had done, and it finally becomes clear to everyone that Oedipus has killed his father and married his mother. Condemned by his own decree, Oedipus is completely ruined. Aristotle's comment on the episode is brief, as usual, but the passage is well known. Through the discovery which is the reversal in the tragedy, Oedipus suffers not a gradual loss of status, but a swift fall from royal power and prestige to the life of an outlaw. We see him at the same time as both a great and noble leader, and a miserable outcast. He appears to us as both a noble king and a self-condemned criminal. The reversal is not entirely unanticipated, but the passage in which the shepherds make their unintentional revelation is powerful and striking by its suddenness. Most important of all, it is the same quality in Oedipus that brings his success and his misery. He is king because he solves the Sphinx's riddle: he values knowledge and is wise. He falls into ruin because of this same wisdom, since he would not have been in a position to commit his crime otherwise. His desire to discover the source of pollution, and of his own identity, is typical of the same drive to know. The Greeks recognized the value of self-knowledge as urged by the Delphic "know thyself," but Sophocles' tragedy shows Oedipus' self-knowledge to be just as destructive as it is beneficial.

Aristotle next mentions a lost tragedy called the *Lynceus.* The reversal here, he says, happens when someone unnamed is led away with Danaus about to kill him, but instead Danaus is killed and the other lives (1452a27-29). We do not know what the context is, but Aristotle presents the change as if taking place in a moment. Here again, the verbs juxtaposing the ends of the two characters are aorists. The audience would presumably see Danaus with his enemy at his mercy, and then suddenly being killed by that enemy. Unfortunately, we cannot say anything

definite about Danaus' character, but the suddenness of reversal seems to be present in this narrative as well.

Aristotle's last example in this passage is taken from *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, in which two discoveries are together a single reversal in the action (1452b3-8). Iphigeneia reveals her identity as daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra to Orestes when she tells them the contents of the message she wishes to be brought back to Argos by Pylades as she sacrifices Orestes to Artemis. This discovery naturally leads Orestes to reveal his identity to Iphigeneia. Their mutual recognition means that Iphigeneia will not sacrifice Orestes to Artemis, though she had been on the verge of leading him off to do so. The horror of Orestes' murder at his sister's hands is felt as if actual. As Aristotle says, a "near miss" is felt as if it actually occurs (and such things are "most wondrous," *Rhetoric* 1371b10-12). The audience feels joy at the reunion of brother and sister, even before they have recognized each other, but also horror at Orestes' imminent sacrifice, at the same time. The source of both joy and horror is the same, namely Iphigeneia's and Orestes' piety. Orestes comes to the Taurians out of obedience to Apollo, and Iphigeneia dutifully performs service to Artemis, even though it means sacrificing fellow Greeks. Strikingly, the two would not be reunited unless Iphigeneia were intending to sacrifice Orestes, since otherwise she would have had no reason to speak the message aloud. Brother and sister are rejoined and yet almost destroyed by piety.

I have commented on the *Iliad* already, but here I want to point out that the reversal in this narrative highlights the dominant dimension of Achilles' character, namely his courage, and the love of honor that goes along with it. The reversal occurs when Patroclus is killed, and Achilles returns to battle to avenge Patroclus' death. With the death of his closest companion,

Achilles falls into complete misery, whereas he had been the greatest and most successful of Greek warriors. The narrative is constructed so that we see Patroclus' death and Achilles' misery as direct consequences of Achilles' desire for revenge against the other Greeks. It turns out that the same courage and love of honor makes Achilles both the greatest and most miserable of the Achaeans. One way in which the *Iliad* differs from the tragedies is that the courage of its hero will bring him the even greater glory of defeating Hector and effectively the city of Troy itself, after his fall into ruin.

In each of these cases, I suggest, the audience feels both fear and pity in response to what the hero does and suffers alongside a recognition of the hero's nobility. These reversals do not exhibit a smooth or gradual alteration in the welfare of the hero, but a dramatic and striking about-face. The sudden reversal vividly strikes us by putting the hero's good and bad fortune next to each other in such a way that we see that the source lies within the hero himself. The suddenness of reversal and the emotions it juxtaposes point to the presence of some contradictory source, since there must be a reason for the contrary qualities of the hero's action manifested in the reversal.

According to Aristotle's account, the reversal in a tragic narrative is caused by the hero's character. An action is of a certain sort, he says in *Poetics* 6, because of character and thought (*Poetics* 1449b37-38). He echoes here his analysis of human action in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, in which he defines "choice" (προαίρεσις) as deliberative desire (1139a23). By this definition, action has its source in the conjunction of character and thinking. These two dimensions, thinking and character, together are equally necessary for action: thinking is deliberation toward an end, and character is the disposition to see the given end as good. Without an end to aim at, or

a process of reasoning by which the end is achieved, there would be no action at all. In *Poetics* 6 he claims that character and thinking should go hand-in-hand: the agents, including above all the hero, are of one sort or another because of both character and thinking (1449b37-38). In *Poetics* 15 he claims that thinking serves to reveal character (1454a17-19). The hero's thought should be what is likely to or what necessarily follows from character (1454a35-36). Because thinking serves to reveal character, the latter acts as a more fundamental cause in tragedy.

The priority I assign to character over thinking is not arbitrary. In Aristotle's psychology, character sets the end for the hero, while thinking is the deliberation toward the end. The kind of thinking Aristotle has in mind here is not thinking about what the appropriate end is among a range of possible ends, but deliberation toward an end already determined by character. The question of what the end should be is question for practical philosophy, not for the tragic hero. The question of what the end should be is prior to the question of what path to take toward the end. The question of the end is more universal, and is the primary question of Aristotle's ethics. The question of the appropriate means by which one reaches the end is particular to the situation in which one finds oneself. A contradiction in character therefore has more potential for generating a philosophical problem and insight.

The causal priority of character to action is apparent in Aristotle's distinction between two fundamental types of narrative, simple and complex. These narratives are either simple or complex depending on whether the actions they imitate are simple or complex (*Poetics* 1452a12-14). A simple action as one whose change does not involve either recognition or reversal, and a complex action as one whose action has recognition, reversal, or both recognition and reversal (1452a14-18). As an imitation of action (1449b24), a narrative reflects action, so it must have

the same sort of change as the action it imitates, and because a reversal is a kind of change, a narrative that has reversal does so because of the action it imitates. It follows that a narrative about an action that develops with reversal must itself have something corresponding to narrative reversal. Since the cause of action is character, a narrative that develops with reversal must do so because of the hero's character. This claim is surprising given that the reversal is a change of fortune, whereas action is caused by the hero's character and thought. Nonetheless, Aristotle traces a direct link from character to fortune in *Poetics* 6 when he says that action is of the sort that it is because of character and thought, and all people succeed or fail (τυγχάνουσι καὶ ἀποτυγχάνουσι πάντες) through action (1449b38-1450a3). While fortune is external to the hero's character and action, the claim is that there is some kind of coordination of the hero's character and fortune. I will explain how this can be below.

Aristotle claims that the best kind of tragic narrative would have both recognition and reversal. When recognition and reversal happen together, the tragedy has either pity or fear (ἢ ἔλεον ἕξει ἢ φόβον), and tragedy's function is to imitate pitiable or fearful actions (1452a36-1452b3). Aristotle leaves open the possibility that recognition without reversal can enable tragedy to accomplish its end. If it does, it may do so by inspiring wonder in a different way than reversal does. At the least, Aristotle seems to suggest that discovery is necessarily wondrous when he argues that the result of the best kind of discovery is "awe-striking" (1455a17). As I have already argued, to be "awe-striking" is to be wondrous. In the case of discovery, though, the wonder belongs primarily to the characters in the tragedies, rather than to the audience. His examples are again *Oedipus Rex* and Euripides' *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*. The discovery in the former is Oedipus' discovery of his true identity, in the latter of

Iphigeneia and Orestes' discovery of each other. The sudden recognition of Odysseus by his old nurse in the *Odyssey* is another instance (1454b26-27). In all these cases, the audience is already aware of the hero's identity, and while the discovery contributes to the audience's experience, it is not by their own recognition of the hero's identity. Aristotle's thought is perhaps that discovery results in wonder for the hero or some other character, while reversal is wondrous to the audience. In the best tragedies, both occur together. Discovery seems to enhance the wonder of reversal: we feel the weight of the change more powerfully because Oedipus, Iphigeneia, and Orestes feel it. Therefore, although not all tragic narratives must have reversal in order to be tragedies, reversal is an element in the best kind of tragedy, and perhaps contributes even more to its end than discovery does. Because reversal is caused by character, the source of wonder in the best tragedies is the hero's character.

Aristotle's analysis of complex narratives in *Poetics* 13 further demonstrates the importance of action and the internal state of the agent for how the narrative develops. The development proper to tragedy is reversal from good to bad fortune. Whether a narrative has the right kind of reversal for tragedy is determined by the ethical status of the agent, and so formulating this status is essential to Aristotle's account of tragedy. In order for the narrative to develop tragically, the hero must change from good to bad fortune not through bad character (μοχθηρίαν, 1453a15), but through some kind of ἁμαρτία. The hero cannot be someone who is unqualifiedly good (i.e. not someone ἐπιεικής, 1452b34), since then the tragedy would not have fear and pity. The hero cannot be someone thoroughly bad either, since in that case there will be no pity. The vicious agent deserves his suffering, and a narrative about such an agent would satisfy our sense of justice, but would not evoke pity. The tragic hero is someone between these

ethical states (1453a7). The cause of the reversal is not outstandingly good or outstandingly bad character, but a great ἁμαρτία (1453a15-16). The precise nature of ἁμαρτία is debated, but my argument does not depend on resolving this controversy. Whatever the ἁμαρτία is, and however culpable the hero is for the ἁμαρτία – whether it is a moral failure or non-culpable ignorance, or whether Aristotle intentionally allows its nature as a failure to be indefinite[73] – it belongs to the hero as part of the hero's character. The narrative development from good to bad fortune is therefore caused by the character of the hero.

My argument that reversal points to a problem about the hero's character, and that tragedy's function is to raise this problem in the minds of the audience, may seem to conflict with the emphasis Aristotle puts on the value of a tragedy's story over the character displayed in it. In *Poetics* 6, he argues that tragedy is an imitation of the hero's action, because happiness and misery lie in action (1450a16-22). Character on the other hand is a quality, which contributes to the action, but does not in itself make the hero happy or wretched. The actors do not imitate character directly because action has priority in tragedy as it has priority in life. Aristotle argues for the priority of a tragedy's story over all other parts on this basis, claiming that "happiness and wretchedness consist in action… it is a result of their actions that they are happy or the opposite" (1450a17-20). Living well, not just having good character, is the proper end of human nature. Happiness is not just in the possession of good character, it is the activity in accordance with good character. Otherwise, we would have to count someone in whom virtue lies dormant, as is the case with someone who is asleep, as living just as well as someone who acts virtuously

73 P. van Braam, "Aristotle's Use of Ἁμαρτία," *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1912): 266-272 and Arthur W. H. Adkins, "Aristotle and the Best Kind of Tragedy," *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 1, (1966): 78-102 for example argue that ἁμαρτία excludes moral error, but is instead a non-culpable error in judgment; Robert Dyer, "'Hamartia' in the 'Poetics' and Aristotle's Model of Failure," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, vol. 4, no. 4 (1965): 658-664 and T. C. W. Stinton, "Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy," *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1975): 221-254 argue that ἁμαρτία cannot be restricted to such non-culpable error.

(*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098b31-1099a3). Nonetheless, when Aristotle puts priority on action, he does not undermine the causal role of character. Character (together with thought) underlies action as its cause, in the same way that virtue underlies happiness, because virtue is a kind of character, and happiness is a kind of action. The relation between character and action is the same as the relation between virtue and happiness. So when I say that the purpose of tragedy is to make us think about a problem, and that the problem has to do with character, this claim does not conflict with the priority Aristotle puts on action. The first concern of the *Poetics* is to shed light on what a tragedian should do to make a good tragedy, but no narrative can provide an immediate view of character, as a sort of window into the soul. The tragedian works immediately with what is apparent to an audience, and what is apparent is action. For this reason, Aristotle is concerned first and foremost with action, without negating the causal role of character. Tragedy has to lead our attention inward from what the hero does to the hero's character, so that we see the nature of the problem clearly.

The upshot of my survey of the nature of reversal and its source in the hero's character on Aristotle's account is that Aristotle could expect the audience to find the cause of the conflict in the action – the contrast between the hero's apparent success and then sudden ruin – in the hero's character. The members of Aristotle's intended audience do not have to be philosophers order to make this move. Nor do they need to be familiar with Aristotle's scientific analysis of action in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in order to think that the way a person acts is determined to a large extent by their character. Therefore, there is no reason to think they would hesitate to trace the hero's action back to their character.

The understanding of reversal that I have spelled out in this section answers the questions of how reversal functions so that it should be a defining feature of the best tragedies, and how the tragedy is to generate wonder in the audience. It is a defining feature of tragedy because it shows what is wondrous by placing opposites side-by-side in the action of the narrative. On my interpretation, it is wondrous as Aristotle claims in the *Rhetoric* because it is a sign of something deeper that is itself wondrous, i.e. the hero's character. The hero's dominant character trait is apparently both a virtue and a vice. Although reversal is only a sign of the hero's character, it is easier to for the audience see because it is at the surface of the narrative. The function of indicating a problem in the hero's character shows why Aristotle would present it as a defining feature of the best tragedy, over and above the fact that the best examples of tragedy happen to have reversal. Reversal shows the audience that there is an impasse, though it does not reveal the precise nature of the impasse. This is a valuable contribution, if I am right that the purpose of tragedy is to raise a philosophically meaningful question in the minds of the audience, leading toward a philosophical insight. If the function of tragedy is to present an impasse to the audience, then there must be a strong indication of one in the narrative. Reversal works this way, I suggest, by putting drastic extremes of practical success and failure in the minds of the audience at one time, revealing the ambiguous nature of the hero's character. Through reversal, tragedy achieves its proper end, and so reversal is a feature of the best tragedies.

II. Action and Chance

So far I have argued that reversal plays the important role of directing the audience's attention to a contradiction in the tragic hero's character. If this is right, then I must address a possible objection regarding chance and its role in tragedy. The problem is that fortune, which is

a kind of chance, defines reversal, but giving an important place to chance seems to be incompatible with Aristotle's claim that a tragedy ought to unfold according to what is necessary or likely as an imitation of the hero's action. So, as Halliwell puts it, "Aristotle is concerned to exclude from the structure of a plot all those sources of causation which are external to the actions of the human figures themselves," and since chance is external to the hero, "Aristotle's whole theory of the genre requires and presupposes the exclusion of chance from the dramatic action."[74] These claims are motivated by Halliwell's appreciation for the narrative unity Aristotle defends, a unity which seems to be at odds with the nature of chance. He is of course right to emphasize narrative unity in Aristotle's account. For my account to be a reasonable interpretation of Aristotle, I must show that chance is compatible with the priority of action and consequent unity of tragedy as Aristotle understands it. I will show that the tragic poet uses chance to accomplish an end the tragic hero could not aim at. In this way, chance allows tragedy to develop paradoxically so that it produces wonder, thus contributing to the function of tragedy. In making this argument, I will also be laying some of the ground for my argument in the next section that the insight the audience is to arrive at is a realization that happiness is internal to the soul.

Let me begin by spelling out the problem more fully, starting with the theme of unity in the *Poetics*. Aristotle demands unity between the parts of a tragedy. Tragedy imitates action, and action has a rational structure: it sets an end and deliberates as to how to achieve the end. Therefore, a tragedy ought to develop according to what is necessary or likely. The necessity or likelihood of tragedy reflects the rational connection between the parts of the action it imitates. The necessity or likelihood of tragedy are its unity. In aiming at a definite end and deliberating

74 Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 146, 208.

to achieve the end, an agent performs one action, and a tragedy ought to be one in the same way. Narrative unity is essential to a good tragedy, since without it there is not really a narrative of one action at all, but of many different actions which do not fit together. Given the character the hero is assumed to possess (see *Poetics* 15), the phases of the hero's action as they unfold ought to be such that we can understand them. There should be no parts that do not follow from the hero's striving to achieve the end. In *Poetics* 8 and 9, Aristotle spells out different ways in which a narrative could fail to be tragic insofar as it lacks this unity. Narratives that fail to be properly unified include narratives of a number of different actions performed by one person whose only unity is in the identity of the agent, as for example told in a work containing all the labors of Herakles (1451a19-22). Historical narratives are even less unified, since they do not have even the unity of a single agent. The actions they narrate have no close rational connection (1451b10-11). These non-tragic narratives highlight the importance of the high degree of unity essential to tragedy as Aristotle defines it. Any significant use of chance in tragedy seems to run counter to this unity because, as Aristotle claims in the *Physics* (196b10-13) and *Rhetoric* what happens by fortune and chance is not necessary or likely. Aristotle says in the *Rhetoric* that things that happen by luck (which is a kind of chance) are things that have no definite cause, are not for the sake of anything,[75] and are not always, or for the most part, or regular (τεταγμένως, 1369a32-34)). Chance is just the opposite of rational unity, and so is external to the one action of a tragedy. Aristotle explicitly denies that a narrative should unfold by chance. In *Poetics* 9 he claims that a tragedy ought to develop so that things happen "through each other" (δι᾽ ἄλληλα, 1452a3-4) and not because of luck or chance. He then offers the story about Mitys as an

75 Halliwell translates Aristotle's μὴ ἕνεκά του as "for no reason" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 209), as if chance were not a cause in any sense. But what Aristotle says is consistent with his claim in the *Physics* that luck is what happens without the agent aiming at what happens, but would be something to aim at (or avoid) if the agent had been aware of the relevant circumstances. See 196b17-19, 197a1-2.

example of how even when things happen by chance, they should seem to happen naturally. The disunity in the narrative is covered over by the poet's trick of making it seem that the murderer is justly punished in a way that follows from his own action. It seems therefore that chance is necessarily detrimental to tragic unity, and a narrative would fail to be a tragedy to the extent that it incorporated chance as an element.

I will now show that, according to Aristotle's notion of chance, there is a way in which chance can contribute to a tragic narrative instead of introducing disunity. This is possible because chance can be partially understood by reason. Aristotle's fullest discussion of chance is in *Physics* II. The context is his analysis of what it means to know natures in terms of proper causes. For Aristotle, to know is to know a cause (194b18-20), and causation is of what happens necessarily or for the most part (196b10-11). To fully understand something is to know its proper causes: the form, matter, source of motion, and end internal to that thing. Scientific knowledge is knowledge of the connection between the nature of a thing and the qualities necessary to it because of its nature, in terms of these four causes. Scientific knowledge of a living thing is knowing how its source of motion, form, and end are all the same (198a24-27). It means knowing how all the essential qualities of a horse, for example, belong to the horse because of its nature. To take another example, we know that the interior angles of a triangle are necessarily equal to two right angles because of what a triangle is. The knowledge that strict causation gives is thus first of all knowledge of what is internal to a substance.

Aristotle defines chance in partial opposition to scientific knowledge in terms of the four causes. Chance is not a matter of what is internal to the nature of a substance, but of what is external (197b20), and so we cannot know what is or what happens by chance with full scientific

knowledge. Nonetheless, things that happen by chance and not by necessity are not completely unintelligible either. We can know what happens by chance to a lesser degree than we can know a substance's nature along with its essential attributes, because what happens by chance has a kind of unity. The unity involved in chance is inferior to that between a substance and its essential attributes, but is an intelligible unity nonetheless. Chance is a cause not of what comes to be always or for the most part, but of what comes to be coincidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκός *Physics* 197a12-14, see also *Rhetoric* (1369a6-7)). The externality of chance and the phrase κατὰ συμβεβηκός suggest that the relation between a substance and one of its accidental attributes (τὸ συμβεβηκός) provides the model for how to understand chance. The relation between an accidental attribute and a nature is not necessary, and is between two things external to each other insofar as the accident is not caused by the nature. Still, the nature is such that the accident can belong to it. Chance appears to be analogous to the unity between the accidental attributes of a substance and the nature of the substance, as opposed to the fully intelligible unity of the essential attributes of a substance and its nature. It is a connection between two things, a connection that is not necessary, but like the connection between the substance and its accidents, the substance has the capacity to possess the accidents. We can understand chance in a way similar to how we can understand that a horse is white: a horse's nature is of such a sort that it can be white, though to be a horse is not necessarily to be a white horse. The unity between the nature and its accidents is less than the unity between it and its essential attributes, but there is a unity nonetheless.[76]

76 See Halper "Aristotle's Accidental Causes" in *Form and Reason: Essays in Metaphysics* (SUNY Press, 1993), 155-182 for an argument that because his causes are independent natures, for Aristotle chance is a cause in the sense that it is the interaction between two or more independently working substances.

Aristotle uses a house and its builder as an example to illustrate how chance works (197a14 ff.). The proper cause of a house is a craftsman, namely a house builder. It is not by chance that a house builder builds a house, because the house builder by definition has the knowledge of how to build a house. To be a house builder is to be capable of building a house. This knowledge is necessary for building a house, and so a house is necessarily and always built by a house builder. On the other hand, by chance a musician builds a house, because the house builder who builds the house also happens to be a musician. There is no inherent connection between being a craftsman and being a musician, and so a house builder is not necessarily or for the most part a musician, but is a musician incidentally. Aristotle's point is that one human being is capable of being both a house builder and a musician, and the house this person builds is not by chance because there is a necessary connection between building a house and being a house builder, but the house is built by a musician by chance, because there is no necessary connection between the knowledge of music and of building houses. At the same time, we can understand how a house can be built by a musician, because we can understand how a human being is of such a nature that both kinds of knowledge, of building houses and of music, can belong to one person. Proper causation is in the relation between the knowledge of how to build houses and the house, since the knowledge is the same as the form of the house (*Met.* 1070b33-34), and this knowledge is itself the capacity to build houses, while chance is the kind of incidental connection between two things that have no inherent causal connection; in this example, the knowledge of music and the form of a house. In this example, a single human mediates between music and the house, but the coincidence lies primarily in the human and the knowledge a human is capable of acquiring by nature. We can therefore say, with the limited degree of understanding that being a

human and these kinds of knowledge allows, that by chance this house was built by this musician. The incidental connection of chance makes chance indefinite and not fully knowable, but knowable as we can know how one individual can be both a house builder and a musician. It is not necessary or for the most part, and so is not completely intelligible; it is intelligible only as an accidental or incidental connection. The limited way in which we can know chance makes chance to that extent rational.

This way of thinking about chance explains the sense in which what happens by chance is opposed to reason (παράλογος, 197a18) but intelligible nonetheless: it is a lesser unity than the fully intelligible unity of a necessary connection between a substance and its essential attributes, and is therefore less knowable than what is necessary. Chance causes are indefinite in the sense that there is no way to fully capture everything that might happen: what can happen by coincidence is unlimited (197a16-17). The cause of what happens by chance therefore not unintelligible in any particular instance, but is as a whole indefinite (ἀόριστος, *Physics* 196b28, *Rhetoric* 1369a33). Chance is not a real universal, since it is in general the operation of no particular substance on another, but in any particular instance of chance a definite nature will operate on another in a way that can be understood.

What this means for tragedy is that the tragic poet can integrate chance into the narrative without necessarily introducing an unintelligible break in the action. Aristotle treats tragedy as if it were, or were analogous to, a natural substance. He characterizes the story or plot as the "soul" of the tragedy (1450a38-39) because it unifies the various parts of a tragedy.[77] Uniting the various organs and functions is precisely what the soul does in a living thing. The necessity in the unfolding of a well-constructed narrative is thus analogous to the essential unity between the

77 Edward Halper lecture, fall 2013.

nature of a living thing and the various properties that necessarily belong to that nature. The lack of necessity in chance is therefore parallel to the internal necessity of a narrative. What happens by chance in a tragic narrative can belong to the narrative in a way analogous to the inherence of an accidental property in a substance. Therefore, although chance is external, it is not inherently destructive of the rational unity and intelligibility of a narrative. It may even play a valuable role, as I will argue below.

Tragedy is not concerned with any kind of chance, but a specific kind, namely fortune or luck (τύχη), good (εὐτυχία) or bad (δυστυχία).[78] Fortune is the kind of chance that belongs to living things with the power of choice (*Physics* 197b6-8). Aristotle defines it counterfactually: what happens by luck is what someone would deliberate about, but out of ignorance does not do so. Fortune is therefore for the sake of something, but is not what an agent aims at (197b19-20). Not being a final cause at which an agent aims, it is the absence of a cause (*Metaphysics* 1070a7-9). This point is essential to understand how chance fits into tragedy on Aristotle's account. Before I turn to tragedy itself, I will explain what it means for chance to be the absence of a cause in such a way that it could bring about a possible end. In *Physics* II.5 Aristotle gives an example of luck, and how an end is brought about not through a cause, namely the agent's deliberation, but by chance. Aristotle imagines someone, whom I will refer to as A, who meets another, B. B is trying to get back money he is owed (196b33 ff.). Conveniently for A, B owes A money. The meeting is coincidental, and A is lucky to have met his debtor B, because the meeting is at just the right time when B is also collecting money and so is able to repay the debt. A's aim is not to meet B. Moreover, the meeting takes place somewhere frequented by neither

78 In general, Aristotle uses the same terminology in both texts (εὐτυχία and εὐτυχεῖν, δυστυχία and ἀτυχεῖν (e.g. *Physics* 197a26-27, *Poetics* 1452b2).

agent, since otherwise the meeting would not be contrary to what is necessary or for the most part (196b36-197a1). This is an example of luck, since A's action (whatever it is) does not usually result in meeting B, but A would have rationally chosen to meet B in order to get his money back, if A had known B was there. B acts as an external cause on A's action, causing it to be an opportunity to get back his money. Fortune here accomplishes an otherwise unlikely end aimed at by neither agent.

Aristotle does not indicate how the poet is to use chance in constructing a tragedy, but fortune's ability to supply an end not aimed for by the agent makes it an obvious device for bringing about an end the hero does not intend. The poet can use fortune to exploit the hero's ignorance, revealing something about the hero contrary to expectation. The primary examples of tragic narratives appear to use fortune in such a way. Oedipus' attempt to find the source of Thebes' pollution is not an attempt to reveal that he himself is that source. He is not aware of his own identity, so he could not even conceive of revealing his crime. Nonetheless, by searching for the source he incidentally discovers that he has committed the crime. Oedipus' prudence in avoiding his prophesied fate and the wisdom by which he solves the Sphinx's riddle (both events presupposed by Sophocles' tragedy) ruin him instead of saving him. Sophocles uses chance in this narrative as a window into Oedipus' ambiguous character. In the *Iliad*, Achilles withdraws from the battle against the Trojans, and Patroclus is incidentally killed, causing Achilles to return to battle and display his courage and overpowering love of honor. His intention was not to gain greater honor – precisely the opposite – but Homer makes use of chance to reveal the ruinous nature of Achilles' courage. Iphigeneia does not intend to sacrifice Orestes, but that she by chance nearly does so manifests the nature of her impiety in performing human sacrifice out of

service to Artemis. In each case, the poet uses chance to supply the occasion to display the hero's character. Aristotle's account of chance invites us to see chance working in these tragedies in this way. In none of these narratives are the events unintelligible because of chance; rather, they unfold as they do through the poet's skillful use of chance.

We can now see that not only does chance not necessarily break the narrative unity of a tragedy, it often plays a fundamental role in the narrative. It enables tragedy to have paradox, an essential element of tragedy according to Aristotle. Besides being an imitation of one action, Aristotle claims that the narrative of a tragedy should develop paradoxically, i.e. in a way that is "beside" or "beyond" (παρά) what we expect should happen (1452a4). Paradox is found in discovery (1455a15-16), which in the best tragedies is simultaneous with reversal. These are the turning points of the tragedy; for example, the moment when Oedipus fully uncovers his origins and brings ruin on himself. Aristotle takes this paradoxical element to be a source of wonder. The moment of discovery and reversal has wonder (ἔκπληξις, 1455a17), because it is not a foreseeable consequence of searching for one's origin. Chance makes up for the difference between the action and its rationally foreseeable consequences. Paradox does not come from unity alone, because there is nothing surprising in what happens only according to necessity or likelihood. Unity is the rational progression of an action, aiming at an end and following a path for how to get to the end as determined by the agent's internal reasoning. Each step leads naturally to the next. There is no need for the unexpected in this kind of reasoning; if anything, what is unexpected poses a possible threat to achieving the end. If the rational development of an action is driven by the deliberation internal to the agent, the unexpected would have to come from something external. There must be something over and above such unity, though not

contrary to unity. As what is not necessary or likely, chance can provide the unexpected, as outlined in the examples above, without violating unity.

To conclude, the externality and incidental nature of chance seem to exclude chance from tragedy, but I have shown that according to Aristotle's notion of chance and the examples he gives in illustration, the externality of chance does not necessarily disrupt the rational unity of a narrative. In fact, the externality of chance is precisely what enables it to play a role in tragedy without breaking its unity. To return to Aristotle's comment in *Poetics* 9 that things should not happen because of luck or chance, his point is not that chance necessarily breaks the unity of the narrative. It does so in the Mitys story, though things happen in such a way that the murderer's death seems to follow naturally; so the discontinuity in the action does not stand out. Aristotle uses this story as an example of how chance can break narrative unity, but it does not follow that chance always works this way. Chance does not necessarily change the hero's end, or the means by which the hero achieves the end, or the underlying character that motivates the hero to achieve the end. It may instead serve to make the hero's action more significant than it would otherwise be. Given that Aristotle's account of chance and fortune open up the possibility that it could operate in this way, and that a reading of the primary tragic narratives along these lines is plausible, we can infer that Aristotle thinks tragedy works in this way.

III. Tragedy and the Nature of Happiness

I will argue in this section that by its nature, tragedy as Aristotle understands it leads the audience to the insight that happiness is not the possession of external goods. This interpretation makes sense in Aristotle's historical context, but arguably has value beyond that context as well. The Greeks of the Classical period inherited a view of virtue and happiness expressed in Homer,

especially the *Iliad*, according to which their content is what Aristotle would call external goods. In Homer, the hero's goodness is his political status and fulfillment of the duties that go along with that status. Virtue is not seen as an element of an inner character apart from such external goods. The ethical thought of the Greeks of the 5th and 4th centuries BC is partly informed by this view, and so is ambiguous regarding the nature of virtue. I will argue that Aristotle sees tragedy as confronting this Homeric element in Greek culture with another strand of thought, that happiness is stable, an idea implied as he sees it in the maxim of Herodotus' Solon, who teaches the Lydian king Croesus to "until a man dies, do not call him happy, but fortunate" (πρὶν δ᾽ ἂν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν, μηδὲ καλέειν κω ὄλβιον ἀλλ᾽ εὐτυχέα, *Histories*, I.32).

The Homeric notion of happiness is at odds with this Solonic assumption to the extent that external goods are by fortune, and fortune is inherently unstable. Aristotle associates Solon's warning with the changes of fortune characteristic of tragedy. In a discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.10 on the impact of misfortune for happiness, with Priam as example, Aristotle mentions Solon's dictum. He takes Solon's claim to mean that real happiness is stable, an assumption he himself thinks is uncontroversial. Because the maxim is a well-known trope in Greek culture, and because Aristotle thinks it is uncontroversial that happiness is stable, he takes it for granted that the audience of tragedy in his ideal city will think of happiness as stable. The concept of happiness (εὐδαιμονία, genuine human flourishing, rather than passing pleasure) also entails stability. Tragedy highlights the instability of external goods, and on the assumption that happiness is stable, shows that happiness is not external goods. Tragedy forces the audience to consider a higher and fuller notion of happiness that preserves the stability of happiness. In this way, tragedy challenges the idea that virtue and happiness are a matter of political status and

wealth. If the audience recognizes that complete happiness must be stable, they will no longer see the tragic hero as truly happy or as truly virtuous, so that the apparent contradiction initially presented by tragedy disappears. The solution to the tragic problem, which is implicit in tragedy, depends on a rethinking of the nature of happiness and virtue as inner dimensions of human nature. Tragedy therefore represents a step toward a genuine advance in ethical thought, and the insight has philosophical value for the citizens of the ideal state. It does not show what happiness is, nor does it in itself makes the citizens better citizens nor philosophers. Nonetheless, it reveals the limitations of Homeric ethics and makes the question of the nature of happiness acute for the audience, opening up the possibility of further investigation.

A. Solon in Aristotle

I turn now to Aristotle's interpretation of Solon's warning not to call anyone happy until they have died in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.10. Because this chapter centers on the significance of misfortune for happiness, with Priam as an example of someone who falls into bad fortune, it is directly relevant to Aristotle's understanding of tragedy. My argument in this section is that for Aristotle the significance of Solon's warning is that happiness is stable, in contrast to fortune, and that this lesson is fundamental to a proper understanding of tragedy as a whole.[79] My aim is not to interpret Solon's warning as Herodotus presents it, but to uncover Aristotle's interpretation of the maxim ascribed to him. I can therefore leave aside the question of how Solon or Herodotus are to be interpreted in their own right. Aristotle is notorious for interpreting other thinkers in light of his own theories, and my aim is to capture his thought, so I need not dwell on the historical validity of his interpretation.

79 My interpretation of Aristotle's interpretation of Solon conflicts with T. H. Irwin's "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 3 (1985): 89-124. Irwin takes it that Solon's point is that happiness is unstable.

Aristotle discusses Solon's claim in the context of arguing that his view harmonizes with what others have said about happiness. On the assumption that people generally hit on some measure of truth in their thinking, even if not the full truth (1098b28-29, cf. *Rhetoric* 1355a15-17), he argues that his own account of happiness is best because it is most complete, containing the valid insights of all other views. The other views do not have the same completeness, so they are less adequate. Some of these views are held by many, while others are held by few who are in high repute (ἔνδοξοι), whose opinions ought therefore to be considered (1098b27-28). He proceeds to divide goods into three kinds: those of the soul, those of the body, and external goods (1098b12-14). Every idea of happiness will make happiness be one of these kinds of goods, or a combination of them. Some have said that happiness is virtue, a view that harmonizes with his own, since virtuous activity belongs to virtue (1098b3-33). Most people believe that happiness is pleasure, and his view accounts for the truth in this view as well, because the life of virtue is the most pleasant (1099a7-21). While he gives more thought elsewhere to these other views (see e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* I.5), in this passage, Aristotle focuses on the proper place of external goods such as friends, wealth, and political power in a happy life, raising the question whether happiness is the possession of such goods. External goods are necessary for happiness, he says, because it is difficult if not impossible to do noble actions without them (1099a31-1099b6). Because of the necessity of external goods, some people even equate good fortune (εὐτυχία) with happiness (1099b7-8). None of these views is right – bodily pleasure is not properly human and therefore is not human happiness, and virtue is not always active while happiness is an activity. Nonetheless, there is some truth in these views. Aristotle strengthens his view of

happiness by accounting for what seems true about each of these views in terms of his own, while avoiding their problems.

But we do not yet have an argument that happiness is not good fortune. Given their importance for life, an importance Aristotle admits, why should happiness not be the possession of external goods? After all, it is hard to see how anyone in poverty and without friends, family, or political standing could be living a complete and flourishing human life. These deprivations undermine the activities characteristic of a good life (including the exercise of the moral and intellectual virtues as Aristotle understands them). Many people become consumed by the pursuit of these goods as ends in themselves. Therefore, to defend his position, Aristotle must show why happiness is not good fortune and the external goods it provides. He does so by considering what the source of happiness is. The source of happiness conditions the nature of happiness itself: if happiness is by nature or by art, then it is internal to character and cannot be external goods like status or wealth; if happiness is by chance, then it would necessarily be external, since external goods are just those that come by chance (1099b20-25). As external, external goods belong to a person by fortune; they do not belong to people necessarily or for the most part. Therefore, if happiness not is by fortune, it is not the possession of external goods. Aristotle's argument against the view that happiness is good fortune is that what is best comes by an internal cause such as nature or art, and happiness is best, so it must come from nature or art, not chance (1099b20-23). Whatever the content of happiness is, it is the best life a human can live, and the best kind of life is a life flowing from an internal cause, so happiness cannot be

good fortune or the possession of external goods. Wealth, honor, and friends are only conditions for happiness, since they are as it were the instruments one puts to use (1099a33-1099b2).[80]

Perhaps surprisingly, after the brevity of his arguments against the views that happiness is pleasure or virtue (he hardly mentions the view that happiness is health, though it is one of the goods mentioned in the Delian inscription (1099a27-28), and gives no argument against it), Aristotle is not yet content to set aside the issue of fortune. What seems to make the idea that happiness is fortune really compelling is the misery that results from bad fortune. This misery is greater in proportion to the good fortune it follows. The misery into which a great king like Priam falls is all the worse for the prosperity that comes before (1100a6-9). And if misery is caused by bad fortune, then happiness must be caused by good fortune. Aristotle must address this common theme in Greek literature of the contrast between success and failure that fortune can bring about. Aristotle does not argue that real virtue somehow avoids all misfortune, but admits that all kinds of things can happen by chance to undermine even a virtuous man's happiness (1100a4-6). Even if happiness is not due to fortune, it may be lost by because of bad fortune.

This line of thought prompts Aristotle to analyze the limits of happiness and our certainty as to whether someone is living a happy life or not. Perhaps, as Solon said (according to Herodotus), we should not call anyone happy while they live (1100a10-11). Solon is one of the reputable men with whose views Aristotle aims to harmonize his own theory of happiness. If

80 While neither virtue nor external goods like wealth and honor are sufficient for happiness, and both are necessary, happiness is not a composite of the two either, as those committed to the inclusive and dominant interpretations of happiness suggest (Sarah Broadie makes a similar mistake, suggesting that the completeness of happiness is the addition of virtue and external goods as things of the same kind ("Aristotle on Luck, Happiness, and Solon's Dictum," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy and Psychology of Luck* (Routledge, 2019), 25-33. As an activity of virtue, happiness is something over and above the external goods that it puts to use. It is virtue, in the sense that it is the working of virtue, instead of only a disposition to act virtuously, which is why Aristotle thinks the identification of happiness as virtue is closer to the truth than the identification of happiness as external goods.

Aristotle can explain the truth in Solon's words in a way that accords with his own definition of happiness, then Solon's insight further verifies his account of happiness (1100b11-12). But the problem Aristotle first faces is how to interpret Solon's meaning. We might take Solon to mean that happiness is unstable. In the *Histories*, the story of how the king of Lydia, Croesus, came to see the truth in Solon's words only after falling into ruin is an illustration of the claim that happiness (εὐδαιμονίην) rarely stays with anyone for long (*Histories* I.5). Herodotus' point is that the gods are jealous and will strike down anyone who seeks to match their happiness (a common trope).[81] Solon's point would then be that happiness, which by nature is divine (as Aristotle notes, 1099b11-12), very often does not last. For a human to be happy would be to approach divinity, and therefore merit severe punishment from the gods. But this is not how Aristotle interprets Solon. Aristotle's thinking is not completely clear here, but he offers three interpretations, as I count them. First, Solon might mean that a man is happy when he is dead. Despite the prevalence of the saying that death is what is best for a man (see e.g. *Histories* I.31, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1224-1227), Aristotle observes that it would be absurd to say that someone is happy when they are dead. Happiness is an activity, and no one is active when they are dead (1100a13-14). Second, Aristotle considers whether Solon means that it is safe to call a man happy after he has died because only then is he out of reach of misfortune (1100a16-17). In other words, death makes a man safe from the chance events endemic to human life, and such safety is to be desired. This would be more a more plausible belief, and therefore a better interpretation (since, he assumes, there must be some valuable truth in what Solon says), but it has problems of its own. Solon must not be interpreted in this way either. For Aristotle, death does not entirely remove us from the possibility of misfortune. Although it is not clear how this

81 Aristotle rejects this pessimistic outlook on human happiness at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b31-1178a2.

view can be consistent with the claim that the dead are not happy, he thinks it is not unreasonable to suppose that the misfortune of one's children and descendants has an influence on one's own happiness, and the fortune of some descendants can be good, while of others it can be bad (1100a21-26).

Aristotle proposes a third and last interpretation. Perhaps Solon did not mean to say that a dead man is entirely out of reach of misfortune, but that we can safely say that he has lived a happy life after we see that he has died well, given that he flourished during life. Happiness would be attributed to a dead man not as a dead man, but as having been happy during life (1100a33-34). On this interpretation, Solon only means to caution us that we have to see how someone's life ends before we can be sure whether their life was complete and therefore really happy or not. Aristotle thinks this seemingly reasonable claim is also objectionable. On this interpretation, he worries that the point is that our fear about what misfortunes might befall him in the future justify not calling a man happy even while he is prosperous and genuinely flourishing.

Aristotle says that it would be a strange to say that someone is not happy regardless of how well they are now living because to do so would deny the quality of their life, only on the basis of uncertainty of what is to come. In other words, Aristotle's objection is that on this interpretation, Solon is saying that, depending on how the future turns out, it is false to call someone happy whose life meets the criteria of happiness, as if the future state of their life could now determine the truth value of such a claim (1100a34-1100b4). This in itself is objectionable, but it arises out of a deeper assumption about the nature of happiness. Aristotle ascribes two assumptions to Solon. The first is that life contains changes from good to bad (1100a35-

1100b1). Good fortune can quickly turn to bad, as does Croesus' fortune does in Herodotus' narrative. When he meets Solon, Croesus is the great king of Lydia at the height of his success. After misinterpreting the oracle at Delphi, Croesus confidently brings war to the neighboring Persians, who suddenly besiege his capital of Sardis, taking the city within two weeks by a daring scaling of the walls. No change could be more dramatic. Aristotle does not object to this assumption. The second assumption is that happiness is stable (μόνιμόν, 1100b2) and "not at all easily changed" (μηδαμῶς εὐμετάβολον 1100b3). As Aristotle interprets him here, Solon is saying that misfortune undermines our reason for thinking a man was ever happy in the past, though he may have been prosperous. Misfortune is a kind of instability, and so a life characterized by great misfortune is not *completely* happy, and therefore not happy. We cannot truthfully assert that someone living well now, but suffering profound misfortune later, is really happy at all. No one, as Aristotle observes, would call Priam happy. In allowing that a man may have "good luck," while not really flourishing unless this good luck lasts until death, Solon in effect makes a distinction between between fortune and happiness on the assumption that happiness is stable and continuous throughout life, whereas fortune is naturally unstable.

My argument is that Aristotle's understanding of Solon's thought gives us a valuable insight into how he thinks tragedy functions. The decisive point in Aristotle's evaluation of Solon is the conviction that happiness is stable. In this regard, Aristotle is in agreement with Solon. Aristotle sees stability as characteristic of the completeness of happiness. Happiness is complete in the sense that once we are happy, there is no further end outside of happiness to be desired. It is by definition the best and final end, beyond which there is nothing better. Aristotle infers from this completeness that happiness must last over a significant course of time.

Happiness would not be complete and most desirable if it were a passing experience like pleasure. As the highest good, we necessarily want it to endure throughout life, and are not fully satisfied if it does not. As he says, “one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day make a man blessed” (1098a18-20). Furthermore, this completeness is not due to chance, but to the nature of happiness itself. For Aristotle, happiness is stable because it is activity in accordance with virtue (1100b12-16). Virtue is stable, and because happiness is an activity of virtue, happiness is stable. Happiness is virtuous activity, and virtuous activity tends to sustain the conditions necessary for its own sake. It is true that for Aristotle one can lose the ability to fully act in accordance with reason as a result of bad fortune. A person has at best limited control over external causes, and a certain degree of external good are necessary for happiness. Only great misfortune like the misfortune of Priam ruins happiness, and even in such bad circumstances virtue is at work to some extent. Virtue does the best that can be done in unfortunate circumstances, as an excellent general does the best that can be done even when outmatched in resources by the enemy (1101a3-5). Furthermore, even when happiness is lost due to misfortune, virtue “shines through” (διαλάμπει 1100b30-31) in the midst of suffering, preventing the virtuous person from falling into complete ruin. Even in misfortune, the virtuous person always does the best with the available resources, as an excellent general does the best he can do with the forces at hand (1101a3-4). The kind of stability that belongs to happiness keeps it to some extent out of the reach of fortune, because its stability is grounded in the stability of virtue. The loss of the goods undermines the possibility of exercising virtue, but virtue considered on its own is stable, and so its activity is as well. Strictly speaking, true happiness is the activity of virtue along with sufficiently good fortune throughout life, and we might want to

call this lifelong happiness “blessedness” to distinguish it from the happiness as the activity of virtue without reference to the scope of a whole life (as Aristotle seems to do at 1101a19-21). But the fundamental point is that that activity is stable and tends to perpetuate itself. Therefore, what Aristotle’s objection to Solon’s maxim comes to is that if happiness is stable, then anyone who is living well in the present will probably continue to do so in the future. The happy man is stable and not “easily moved from happiness” (1101a9-10). Solon fears misfortune too much, and so fails to make the inference from the inherent stability of happiness to the realization that it tends toward its own maintenance.

I suggest that the underlying problem Aristotle exposes in Solon’s view is that it does not ground happiness in virtue. In Aristotle’s mind, Solon thinks of happiness as external goods, and its stability as mere temporal duration. He implies that Solon follows the fortune of a man’s life: if (like Solon) we were to follow a person’s fortunes in calling them happy, then they would vacillate between happiness and unhappiness throughout their lives, like a chameleon (1100b4-7). If Solon is only following fortune, his warning implies that if a man’s prosperity happens to last until death simply because of fortune, then that man really is happy. A life of continuous prosperity of external goods is a happy life, and there is no qualitative difference between Priam’s prosperity and the prosperity of a king who does not experience such misfortune. If this is how Aristotle interprets Solon, then the problem he finds with Solon’s claim it is that while trying to isolate happiness from bad fortune in accordance with the assumption that happiness is stable, it does so by equating happiness with good fortune over the course of a whole life. The stability of happiness would then be only the stability of fortune, but fortune is precisely what is unstable. Solon’s warning is therefore inconsistent with the very assumption of stability that

motivates it. In Aristotle's mind, his own account is better because it is consistent with the assumption. Aristotle shows the superiority of his account of happiness by showing how it captures the truth that Solon hits on without running into the inconsistency in Solon's reasoning.

To show that the function of tragedy in the ideal state is to make the audience see that happiness is not external goods, I must not only show that Aristotle thinks happiness is stable, but that he takes this to be a generally accepted assumption. There is good reason to think, as I will now argue, that Aristotle thinks it is an assumption generally held by his fellow Greeks, and therefore that it would be held by the citizens of the ideal city. Aristotle's presentation of the problem in Solon's thinking suggests that Solon (and Aristotle himself as well) makes this assumption without argument. If the reputable Solon thinks this way, then the idea is current and apparently uncontroversial in the Greek world. This conviction is also rooted in the concept of happiness. For these reasons, Aristotle takes for granted that the audience of tragedy in his imagined ideal city will judge that happiness is stable. On the basis of these observations, we can infer that Aristotle sees tragedy as putting this assumption to work to show that happiness cannot be the possession of external goods.

To begin with, Solon's maxim was well-known from Herodotus. From Aristotle's perspective, on a reasonable interpretation, the maxim is motivated by the conviction that happiness is stable. The first interpretation Aristotle offers, that a man is happy when he is dead, does not necessarily rely on such an assumption, but the maxim interpreted in this way is hardly reasonable in Aristotle's mind, and he quickly dismisses it. As I have already shown, on both the second and the third interpretations, i.e. that the dead man is out of reach of misfortune, and that great misfortune at the end of a life prevents any prior prosperity from being real happiness,

Solon is relying on the assumption that happiness is stable. Aristotle offers no other reasonable interpretations, so it is clear that he thinks Solon's warning only has significance on the basis of this assumption. It would make no sense to warn against calling someone happy, if happiness were already thought of as a fleeting enjoyment.

Aristotle gives us reason apart from his discussion of Solon to think that he takes the belief to be generally accepted. The places in which he expresses his agreement suggest that in itself the assumption is uncontroversial. After noting that happiness is complete and defining happiness as an activity of reason in accordance with virtue through careful argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7, he adds the point that happiness is also complete over a whole lifetime almost as an afterthought. It is certainly not immediately obvious to an average person what the completeness of happiness would amount to, but it must include duration. For Aristotle, it is essential to human nature to aim at happiness, and adding the point that we want our happiness to continue into the future almost says nothing. If we want to be happy, we want to continue to be happy. This thought may not be a fully conscious thought, and so it is a point worth making, but it is not supposed to be controversial. After discussing Solon in I.10 he repeats the point that happiness is stable, but without adding any content to the nature of happiness or its completeness that he had not already accounted for in I.7. He concedes to Solon that the truly happy man is the man who will live happily until death, and we cannot be sure who will die happily given the uncertainty of the future. Nonetheless, the concession does not grant anything new or lead to a significant qualification of Aristotle's account of happiness. Happiness is more or less continuous over the course of a whole life because it is complete, as he has already argued. The underlying claim that happiness is stable is never seriously at issue, indicating that Aristotle

thinks it not worth disputing. From Aristotle's perspective, Solon's insight (though not unique to him) is not that happiness is stable, but that misfortune is always a possibility, despite present prosperity. Although he of course recognizes that not everyone understands what makes happiness stable as he does, Aristotle supposes that everyone who thinks of happiness as an overall good life must think of it as stable. The theme, in Herodotus and elsewhere, of a fall from the height of prosperity into the depth of misery an ruin only makes sense on the recognition that it would be better not to have so fallen. Aristotle can therefore be confident that the citizens of the best city will think that happiness is stable.

B. Solon in Tragedy

In this section I will argue that for Aristotle the natural function of tragedy is to show that happiness is not a collection of external goods by highlighting the inherent instability of fortune. Change of fortune, from good to bad, is a major element in tragedy on Aristotle's account, but this change by itself does not let us infer anything significant. However, it does have significance when set beside the idea that happiness is stable. I will argue that Aristotle thinks that tragedy shows the audience that happiness cannot be a matter of fortune and therefore cannot be external goods by putting on display the instability of fortune against the background assumption that happiness is stable. If the audience assumes that happiness is stable, as I have argued, then the natural outcome of watching a tragedy is the realization that happiness cannot be good fortune. In this section, I will argue that Aristotle thinks that the point of Solon's dictum is directly relevant to how the audience will interpret tragedy. In the next section, I will explain how the insight that happiness is not external has philosophical value for the audience of Aristotle's ideal city.

I will argue first from Aristotle's text, then from a small selection of the tragedies themselves in which the background assumption that happiness is stable is brought into the foreground in words similar to Solon's warning. The passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1100a4-1101a21) in which Aristotle interprets Solon's maxim is in effect, besides an account of the permanence of happiness, an argument that a tragic hero is not and never was happy, because his or her success is a matter of fortune. The primary target of investigation is the impact fortune has on happiness, and therefore bears on the meaning of tragedy. Aristotle introduces his discussion of Solon's maxim with the sufferings of Priam:

> For there are many changes and all kinds of fortunes in life, and it is possible for one who is steering straight to fall into great misfortunes in old age, just as in the stories told about Priam in the Trojan War, but no one would call anyone who experiences these sorts of fortunes and dies wretchedly happy (1100a5-9).[82]
>
> πολλαὶ γὰρ μεταβολαὶ γίνονται καὶ παντοῖαι τύχαι κατὰ τὸν βίον, καὶ ἐνδέχεται τὸν μάλιστ᾽ εὐθηνοῦντα μεγάλαις συμφοραῖς περιπεσεῖν ἐπὶ γήρως, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς Τρωικοῖς περὶ Πριάμου μυθεύεται· τὸν δὲ τοιαύταις χρησάμενον τύχαις καὶ τελευτήσαντα ἀθλίως οὐδεὶς εὐδαιμονίζει.

The reference to Priam and the language Aristotle uses here shows that the kind of misfortune he has in mind is the kind of misfortune presented in tragedy. Aristotle highlights Priam's mythical status as king of Troy by using the verb μυθεύεται, "the story (μῦθος) is told." Stories surrounding the Trojan War are canonical subject matter for tragedy, and were dramatized by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Priam's sufferings late in life make him an excellent subject for a tragic narrative showing his fall from great good fortune to abject misery. He is a

82 My translation.

king of a great city who is humiliatingly and impiously killed in the city's temple of Zeus during the sack of his Troy. All his people and his family are killed or enslaved by the Greeks. His misery is complete and unmitigated. These are tragic sufferings akin to those of Oedipus. That Priam was not a Greek does not at all detract from the tragic nature of the change in fortune Aristotle describes (consider Euripides' *Trojan Women*, *Andromache*, and *Hecuba*).

Aristotle presents Priam's suffering in terms similar to those he uses in the *Poetics* to formulate the nature of a tragic narrative. The verb Aristotle uses to describe the change here is περιπεσεῖν, the verbal cognate of "reversal" (περιπέτεια). Although the verb by itself does not have the technical meaning of the noun, in this context it is telling, because it describes a change in Priam's fortune. Moreover, as in the *Poetics* the verb is aorist, suggesting that the change it indicates is sudden. Aristotle uses the same verb shortly after, again in the aorist, to describe fortunes like those that befell Priam at 1101a6-8. There is no hint of future misfortune: the change happens to someone moving through life with complete success and without hindrance (τὸν μάλιστ᾽ εὐθηνοῦντα). Solon's warning, to which Aristotle turns next, that misfortune can strike even when least expected, is motivated by tragic suffering like this. Aristotle does not apply the conceptual apparatus of fear and pity, catharsis, and ἁμαρτία to describe Priam as a tragic hero, but he is not giving a formal account of tragedy here as he does in the *Poetics*. He only briefly mentions Priam to introduce his discussion of Solon, and he clearly has in mind the kind of misfortune characteristic of tragedy.

What are we to make of sufferings like Priam's? Is happiness at the mercy of fortune to such an extent, as Herodotus and others suggest, that what happens at the end of a life can completely negate the value of a life up to that point? If so, we are left with a bleak view of

human life – it may after all be better never to be born than to live and suffer, as Sophocles' Oedipus claims in *Oedipus at Colonus*. But Aristotle rejects such a pessimistic outlook. The value of tragedy, he thinks, is not to show the inherent fruitlessness of striving for happiness, but to raise the possibility in the minds of the audience that happiness is something other than external goods, something that is not so inherently unstable and shifting.

The passage under discussion constitutes an argument that the tragic hero was never happy on the basis of Solon's assumption that happiness is stable. After explaining how his own view harmonizes and improves on Solon's in the passage I discussed above, Aristotle returns to Priam. He says that the happy person will not become wretched, not even if he suffers the misfortunes of Priam (1101a6-7). This claim implies that if Priam, whom Aristotle has already described as ending his life wretchedly (ἀθλίως, 1100a9), becomes wretched after his suffering, he was never truly happy. Aristotle makes this inference on the basis of the stability of activity in accordance with virtue. What is essential for happiness is activity in accordance with virtue. Nothing in life is more permanent, because those who are happy spend their lives in exercising virtue continually (1100b11-23). Moral action as Aristotle understands it is not an intermittent activity, but is more or less constant. For example, the happy person is constantly exercising moderation insofar as choices as to how much pleasure to indulge in are made throughout every day. The happy person is also a ruler, and chooses to rule with justice on a daily basis. All these activities also require an exercise of practical wisdom. The happy person will spend just about all their waking time in practical or contemplative activity in accordance with virtue (1100b19-20). Therefore, the happy person cannot forget how to act virtuously and be happy, and will continue to act with reason. In the most extreme cases, this may only mean facing suffering with

nobility, rather than giving in to despair, but that in itself is the rule of reason over the passions and so valuable for its own sake. The upshot is that no one blessed could become wretched (1100b33-34). Priam is successful only by fortune, and his success does not have the stable footing of virtue. Although he thinks Solon's reasoning is faulty, Aristotle makes this argument on the basis of Solon's dictum, which in effect denies that the tragic hero was happy before their suffering.

If Priam is representative of the tragic hero in general, as Aristotle's language suggests, then Aristotle is essentially arguing that the tragic hero is not happy because their success was unstable. Tragedy displays this instability. The audience that watches tragedy sees the inherent instability of fortune, and infers, on the further assumption that happiness is stable, that the hero was not happy. If the happy person cannot become wretched, but the tragic hero becomes wretched, then the tragic hero was not happy even before falling into misfortune. Of course, Aristotle cannot count on the audience to understand happiness in terms of an activity of reason in accordance with virtue. They will nonetheless, he thinks, assume that happiness is stable, and so be in a position to infer that the hero was never really happy. Aristotle's observation that no one would call Priam happy after his misfortune is extended by Solon's maxim to the insight that Priam was not happy before his misfortune either.

Solon's maxim appears in some tragedies, justifying the relevance of his maxim for tragedy, and giving Aristotle further reason to think that the audience would be able to infer that the tragic hero was not really happy. I will give three instances of tragedies in which the chorus or dramatic characters repeat Solon's maxim: Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, and Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hippolytus*. In each case, the maxim is a comment on the suffering of the tragic

hero, who is offered as proof of the uncertainty of happiness in the face of possible changes in fortune. The assumption is always that real happiness is stable, and the obvious inference is that the tragic hero was never happy.

At the end of the *Oedipus Rex*, the chorus comments on Oedipus' fortune. Although these lines may not be genuine, calling into question whether Aristotle would have associated them with the play, they are worth mentioning, if only because Aristotle offers this tragedy as a paradigm.[83] Oedipus, the chorus reminds us, solved the Sphinx's riddle and so rose to power in Thebes, and for that good fortune he was a man to be envied. They warn us on the basis of Oedipus' subsequent misfortune to count no man happy before death (μηδέν᾽ ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἂν τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεινὸν παθών.): "call no one happy before he comes to the end of life suffering no loss." As in Herodotus' narrative, the primary point is not that happiness is stable, but the imperative only makes sense on that assumption: Oedipus suffered great misfortune, and so we should never have called him happy, even long before his suffering, because complete happiness is stable and excludes misfortune. Contrary to appearances, Oedipus did not lead a happy life before he was ruined.

Hecuba, queen of Troy, makes a similar claim in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. She compares the good fortune she enjoyed as queen of a great city and mother of the Trojan princes, including Hector, with the misery of first having to see all her sons killed in battle against the Greeks, then her husband Priam killed at the altar of Zeus, and finally her daughters snatched from her by the victorious Greeks. She concludes her mourning with the words "Of all who walk in bliss / call not one happy yet, until the man is dead" (τῶν δ᾽ εὐδαιμόνων μηδένα

83 The first two lines are identical to 1758-1759 of Euripides' *Pheonician Women*.

νομίζετ᾽ εὐτυχεῖν, πρὶν ἂν θάνῃ 509-510).[84] These words are close to Solon's. For Hecuba, they mean that in spite of the blessedness she experienced, the devastation brought on her and her city undermines that joy. In light of the misfortune she would later suffer, she could not have truthfully said in earlier days that she was happy.

The last example is from Euripides' *Hippolytus*. The story takes place in Athens. Hippolytus is a bastard son of the king, Theseus, and the secret object of queen Phaedra's love. In the course of the narrative, Hippolytus discovers Phaedra's love for him. In her shame, she hangs herself, but leaves a note for Theseus claiming that she was raped by Hippolytus. Theseus believes Phaedra's words, and in his outrage exiles and curses Hippolytus. Theseus banishes Hippolytus from Athens, and the chorus comments "I cannot say of any man: he is happy. / See here how former happiness lies uprooted!" (981-982).[85] These words are less similar to Solon's than those in the *Oedipus Rex* or *Trojan Women*. The chorus does not explicitly mention death or make a distinction between temporary good luck and real happiness as Solon does. Nonetheless, the thought is once again essentially the same: because of the great misfortune he meets with here, Hippolytus was never really happy, despite the success he had a prince of a great city.

These three examples suggest that Solon's maxim was generally associated with tragic suffering in the tragedies themselves. And again, in each case, the hero's misfortune is offered as proof that good fortune is fleeting and uncertain. Against the background assumption that happiness is stable, the inference is that the hero was never really happy. Whatever happiness is, the tragic hero never has it. The point is that after watching a tragedy of this kind, the audience

84 Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (The University of Chicago Press, 1958).
85 Euripides, *Hippolytus*, trans. David Grene (The University of Chicago Press, 1942).

can draw the negative conclusion that happiness is not good fortune or the external goods that constitute good fortune, since they are not stable.

C. Homeric Background

I come now to the solution to the tragic impasse and its value. I have argued that tragedy leaves the audience with the problem that the dominant aspect of the hero's character is a virtue and a vice. The realization that happiness is not good fortune or external goods brought about by the juxtaposition of the changeability of fortune and the inherent stability of happiness is crucial for Aristotle's understanding of tragedy because it solves the contradiction. Tragedy in effect takes the assumption that happiness is stable, already present in the minds of the audience, and presents the audience with an argument by adding a new premise. The audience is confronted with an argument: happiness is stable, but fortune and external goods are not stable, therefore happiness is not fortune or the possession of external goods. If happiness is stable, it cannot be good fortune, because fortune easily changes from good to bad in ways that cannot be foreseen.

The solution to the problem emerges out of this line of thinking. Because happiness is not good fortune, the audience has no more reason to think that the tragic hero was ever really virtuous to begin with. The tragic hero is generally regarded in classical Greece as virtuous because of his or her possession of high political status and wealth (I will elaborate on this point below). The hero is always someone highly respected (*Poetics* 1453a10). Since virtue is necessary for happiness (a universally held view in classical Greece), the hero's apparent happiness was the audience's reason for thinking that the hero was virtuous. But once the audience comes to the conclusion that the hero was never happy, they have no more reason to think the hero was virtuous. The audience therefore no longer has reason to see the hero as both

virtuous and vicious in the same respect. The initial problem is thereby dissolved. The hero may have a character quality that is either beneficial or destructive depending on how circumstances bring out the potential of their character, and it is wondrous how what makes a person good for the city is also what makes them a danger to it, but once we see that the hero is not strictly speaking virtuous or vicious, we cannot see them as both virtuous and vicious. Unlike virtue or vice, such a character quality is not inherently productive of either good or evil. Through this line of thinking, the wonder of the impasse is undone. Oedipus' wisdom is can no longer be seen as a virtue strictly speaking, nor can Achilles' courage be seen as virtue strictly speaking. Both were valued because of the external good of honor and success in the political community.

My interpretation of how Aristotle understands the function of tragedy is consistent with the outline of philosophical development he presents in the *Metaphysics*. The tragic impasse and its solution is analogous to the impasses and their solutions Aristotle discusses in the *Metaphysics*. The audience is rationally compelled to accept the insight because it resolves an otherwise intolerable contradiction. Like the impasses in the *Metaphysics*, the tragic impasse must be capable of solution. The audience cannot rationally accept that virtue is vice, any more than they can accept that only natural things move themselves and that an automaton moves itself, or that all sets of lines are commensurable while the hypotenuse of a right triangle is not commensurable with its legs. In the case of tragedy, that virtue appears to be a vice is an apparent contradiction, because by definition virtue is the source of happiness, not of misery. If virtue is also vice, good character and bad character are the same. The impasse is not that some one aspect of the hero's character, such as Oedipus' wisdom or Achilles' courage, is sometimes good and sometimes bad, depending on circumstances, but that one character quality is good in

itself, and also not good but bad in itself. For Aristotle, this is as it stands essentially an unthinkable thought without meaning. It violates the principle of non-contradiction, because it would mean that the same thing is and is not the source of happiness, but it is impossible to believe that the same thing is and is not in the same respect (1005b23-24). To say that one thing is and is not in the same respect and the same time is to say nothing meaningful in ethics just as much as in any other science. The audience is compelled to accept some kind of solution upon pain of losing all intelligibility of character and happiness. The latter is the first principle of Greek ethics, whether philosophical or not, so the cost is intolerably high.

The insight that happiness is not good fortune solves the contradiction, and that it does so is proof that the purpose of tragedy as Aristotle understands it is to give citizens this insight. This is the approach that Aristotle takes to some of the impasses in the *Metaphysics*: we are compelled to accept a claim that solves the contradiction. There is no progress without a resolution of the impasse, but the resolution makes the path forward clear (*Met.* 995a34-995b2). When we are puzzled by the automaton, we can resolve the problem it presents by finding the mechanism that moves it, and if we were to do so we would see how it does not strictly speaking move itself, but is constructed and set in motion by a human being.

Of course, the solution and the key assumptions that make this train of thought possible may not be fully conscious in the minds of the audience. Moreover, any tragedy only presents a single action and therefore a limited scope for recognizing and thinking about the problem. But this point supports my interpretation of tragedy as the proper content for a leisure activity. The audience will need a practice of attending tragic performance in order to have the opportunity to see the impasse clearly and reflect on it. The performance of tragedy will require an institutional

setting. The necessity of an institution to cultivate tragic performance and regular attendance by the audience is a political necessity. For this reason, Aristotle suggests that the ideal city must have such an institution (*Politics* 1342a18-22).

So far, the solution that the tragic hero was never virtuous to begin with may not seem to hold much valuable. It solves the problem, but by itself is only negative and does not do justice to the beauty of a well made tragedy. However, it also leads to a deeper insight about the moral dimension of the soul, which allows for contemplative wonder over and above the wonder of the impasse. For Aristotle, I will argue, the insight that happiness is not external success is philosophically valuable in relation to a confusion about the nature of virtue inherited by the Greeks of the 5th and 4th centuries from Homer.

The confusion is over whether virtue is proper to what we would call the inner character or moral dimension of a human being, and the external circumstances, including other human beings, in which he or she lives. Hermann Fränkel and Bruno Snell have demonstrated that in Homer there is no clear distinction between an interior psychology and exterior world. In fact, there is no conceptual basis in Homer for the distinction between body and soul in a living human being. The words used in the classical period and later for soul (ψυχή) and body (σῶμα) were used only for the dead (σῶμα in Homer only means "corpse"[86]). Likewise in the case of action, there is no distinction between what one does and one's inner character: in Homer "Man is seen as what he does rather than what he is;" "he has no hidden depths."[87] What we would describe as an inner conflict of the mind or soul, Homer sees as a conflict between two different

86 Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (1953; Dover, 1982), 5.
87 Hermann Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, trans. Moses Hadas and James Willis (1973), 76, 77, 79. Fränkel acknowledges that this is truer of the *Iliad* than the *Odyssey* (85 ff.), but even so the distinction body and soul in the classical sense is at best unclear. The inner ontological dimension implicit in the deceit practiced by "wily Odysseus" is not fully recognized in Homer. Snell argues that this inner realm was a genuine discovery brought about only gradually in lyric and tragedy.

things: “there is in Homer no genuine reflexion, no dialogue of the soul with itself,” but e.g. a man with his θυμός, understood not as two parts of one soul but as two different things.[88]

The point is not that Homer’s characters all have an inner harmony that prevents inner conflict, nor that Homer has no conception of character at all. Clearly he recognizes a distinction between heroes: Achilles is hot-tempered, while Odysseus is “wily Odysseus.” The point is that at this early stage in Greek thought, there simply is no definitive acknowledgement of a unified inner character distinct from its own external actions or experiences. Homer apparently does not see either the body or the soul as a unified whole,[89] and so he tends to identify virtue and happiness with external conditions. To be good is to be successful in terms of what Aristotle thinks of as externals: political power and wealth. In Homer, “*arete*, virtue, does not denote a moral property but nobility, achievement, success, and reputation.”[90] The heroes of the *Iliad* are good because they are kings and because excel in battle. A hero may be defeated but still retain the success of glory. Both Achilles and Hector are killed in battle, but their great fame is already established, and fame is itself success.

Educated Greeks (not only philosophers) of the 5th and 4th centuries certainly recognized an inner dimension in human nature, but due to the Homeric inheritance, the common outlook regarding virtue and happiness was still ambiguous. We find it easy to separate a person’s moral status from their political status, but the Greeks still tend to see moral goodness as more or less coextensive with external success, identifying the morally good (the so-called καλοι κἀγαθοι) with the powerful and wealthy. Several of the characters in Plato’s dialogues exhibit this ambiguity regarding virtue and happiness. Their attempts to define virtue or some particular

88 Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, 19.
89 Ibid., 6.
90 Ibid., 158.

virtue conveniently, for my argument, contain this ambiguity. For example, in the *Meno*, *Protagoras* and *Republic*, Meno, Protagoras, and Polemarchus offer views of virtue that tend to externalize moral goodness.

Meno represents the common attitude of a young Greek man hoping to make a good political career. He believes that virtue is political success and wealth. He first defines virtue, in the case of a man rather than a woman or child, as benefiting friends and harming enemies, while keeping himself out of danger (71e). This kind of definition is Homeric. Homer's heroes are virtuous because they harm their enemies and achieve victory for their community. Meno later explicitly defines virtue as being able to rule over others (73c). If we think of virtue as essentially a disposition of character, this way of defining virtue should strike us as strange, because the power to rule over others is not an inner disposition to act in a certain way that we would call morally good or bad. The definition makes virtue high standing in the city. There is nothing obviously moral about such a status. Socrates has to prompt Meno to draw out the further qualification that virtue must be not just ruling, but ruling well, i.e. justly and moderately (73d-74a). Meno's last attempt to say what virtue is, based on the authority of an unnamed poet, is put in terms of good things, especially wealth and honor (78c). His attention is on externals, rather than something internal such as knowledge. When Meno again demands that Socrates say whether virtue is teachable or not, Socrates makes note of Meno's refusal to rule himself (86d). Ruling oneself, in contrast to ruling others, would entail a harmonious inner disposition; in other words, a moral virtue separable from external success. Meno has difficulty imagining virtue as some form of self-rule or an innate knowledge, both of which make virtue interior and in no way dependent on externals.

The *Protagoras* offers a similar picture of contemporary attitudes toward virtue and happiness. In this dialogue, Protagoras claims to be able to teach virtue so that whoever learns from him will come away each day always becoming better (318a-b), by which he means the student will become more and more able to secure what is good for himself. Protagoras thinks of the chief virtue as political virtue: the ability to persuade fellow citizens in a political arena (319a), which is an eminently useful skill (if it is a skill). Protagoras is in effect claiming to give his students the external good of political power. The emphasis again is not on a disposition of character, as it is for Socrates, who here as in the *Meno* argues that virtue is knowledge (356aff.), but on the external.

The *Republic* offers further evidence of the classical ambiguity regarding virtue. Cephalus' definition of justice as paying one's debts (331b-c) makes justice a matter of reputation with the gods. What is important to Cephalus is not the inner disposition from which one acts, but essentially a kind of social success for which the just will be rewarded. Polemarchus, his son, defines virtue as Meno had initially, as benefiting one's friends and harming one's enemies, a definition he is slow to give up on (332a-b). He too reveals a tendency to identify virtue with success in Homeric terms. Finally, Thrasymachus defines justice as the rule of the stronger (338b-c). When he is honest, he admits that he thinks of injustice rather than justice as a virtue (348c-d). The good in his mind are those who rule for their own advantage, not the benefit of those they rule. Ruling for one's own advantage is an activity oriented exclusively toward external goods, not an ethical dimension of the soul. Only Socrates takes pains to emphasize the internal nature of justice in the soul.

In each definition of virtue in Plato's dialogues, the ethical or moral nature of virtue that we take for granted is not fully expressed. Admittedly, some kind of inner disposition may be implicit. At the minimum, in order to rule or to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies, one must have the ability to rule or to benefit friends and harm enemies. Being able to benefit friends and harm enemies in Homer means being courageous and having the ability to face fear and to defeat the enemy in battle. In the classical period, the rhetorical ability to persuade, which presupposes some kind of cleverness, becomes prevalent. Not everyone has these abilities, and so many of Socrates' interlocutors are eager to learn from someone like Protagoras, who claims to be able to instill this ability. But the internal ability is only implicit, and is only for the sake of bringing about some external state of affairs. The proposals in these dialogues demonstrates the lasting influence of Homer and the ambiguity regarding whether virtue is ethical, i.e. an aspect of character rather than honor or wealth. Finally, the ambiguity is certainly not limited to classical Greek culture. Today's rich and powerful, or those of any other cultural setting, are often guilty of taking their wealth and power as proof of their moral goodness. The insight I will draw out is therefore valuable not only for ancient Greeks of the classical period, but has universal significance.

D. Philosophical Value of the Insight

Seen against this background, tragedy offers an insight into man's moral nature. Snell claims that Aeschylus was the first Greek to clearly present an inner mental reality, manifest in the conflict between Orestes' obligations to his mother and father, both of which were sanctioned by the gods.[91] He suggests that tragedy brings an forth an inner psychology by showing Orestes in crisis. This is perhaps too strong. Tragedy leaves the inner sphere implicit. Aeschylus

91 Ibid., 106, 123.

represents Orestes' obligations to his father and mother respectively as Apollo and the Furies. These are powers external to Orestes. My view is weaker than Snell's, but more precise regarding the nature of the conflict. As I see it, tragedy only hints at the interior sphere where character lies. Furthermore, the gods play little role in Aristotle's interpretation of tragedy, so the central conflict in tragedy cannot be between external divine powers (which is not to say that Snell is wrong to discuss the gods – he is not interpreting Aristotle). The conflict is in one aspect of the hero, such that their virtue is also presented as a vice.

Snell's general approach is nonetheless revealing. There is clearly some kind of development in Greek thought on the nature of human action between Homeric and classical Greece expressed in 5th century drama. My contention is that Aristotle recognizes the intellectual contribution of tragedy. He thinks tragedy shows that virtue and happiness cannot be external goods, and that recognition of this truth is essential for the intellectual and moral life of the citizens of a state. If happiness is not external goods and virtue is not external goods because those goods are too unstable, then implicitly happiness and virtue are internal. They are what we call moral or ethical: qualities belonging to a self whose dispositions and actions are not determined by contingent circumstances. The soul is therefore responsible for itself, and capable of engaging in internal dialogue that is recognized as such, and is not only implicit as it is for example for Homer's Odysseus.

At first, this may sound contradictory to my account of the tragic impasse as I spell it out at the beginning of this chapter. I have argued that the impasse is that one aspect of the hero's character is both a virtue and a vice. The deeper insight is that there is an ethical dimension to human nature. How can this be the insight, if the impasse already presupposes some idea of a

person's character? There is no real inconsistency here. The impasse is a recognition that the hero's virtue is also a vice, but my argument is that these are not seen clearly as moral qualities. Prior to the insight that there is an inner dimension of the self, they are equated with a pattern of external action. Oedipus' search for his identity is inseparable from his ruin; Achilles' wrathful disregard for the suffering of the other Greeks is inseparable from his own suffering. The insight into internal nature of the hero's character clarifies the original unacknowledged ambiguity.

The audience is not an audience of philosophers, so they will not necessarily arrive at this insight into the moral dimension. Aristotle cannot take for granted that the negative insight that happiness and virtue are not external will be complemented by the positive insight that they are internal. The difficulty in making the move from the negative to the positive insight is not in inferring that if happiness and virtue are not one opposite (i.e. external) they are the other, but in seeing clearly that there is a distinction between external and internal in human life at all. Tragedy shows that happiness and virtue are not the things that Aristotle calls external goods, but it does not explicitly demonstrate that there is an internal dimension. Nonetheless, if there really is such a dimension, as Plato and Aristotle argue, then tragedy at least points to it. If nothing else, it will raise the question in the minds of the audience of what real happiness and virtue are, opening the citizens up to the possibility that virtue is not power or wealth or any kind of external success. After recognizing that Oedipus' wisdom is not real wisdom, the audience will be faced with the question what real wisdom is. Likewise with Achilles' courage. If Achilles, the Homeric paradigm of a courageous human being, does not have real courage, then what is real courage? If virtue is necessary for happiness, and if courage and wisdom are virtues, these questions are as important as the question what is happiness?

The citizens of the ideal state will not be trained in philosophy and so will not necessarily draw out the full meaning of the impasse as Aristotle understands it. Aristotle provides no philosophical education in the extant portion of his account of education in *Politics* VII and VIII, and most citizens will not be capable of practicing philosophy in the first place (*Politics* 1333a 27-30). But tragedy does not have to achieve this goal in order to be philosophical in the sense Aristotle requires. It need only inspire reflection on the nature of moral character, virtue, and happiness. An appreciation for the tragic impasse is enough to do this. Some citizens will see more deeply into the problem and the implicit insight about human nature than others, but if it does nothing else, tragedy will strongly provoke the audience generally into facing questions regarding the nature of the virtues and happiness.

The positive insight that there is an interior moral dimension has both a practical and contemplative dimension. It has practical value insofar as it motivates the citizens to look for virtue and happiness in some kind of disposition other than external goods, though it does not exclude those goods from a happy life. The insight is contemplative insofar as it is an insight into human nature sought for its own sake rather than for its external benefits. Furthermore, although it presupposes that the hero is not both virtuous and vicious at the same time, it preserves the wonder of tragedy at a contemplative level by revealing the moral source from which the hero's action comes. The tragedy is wondrous because it shows the paradoxical potential in human nature.

The positive insight that tragedy facilitates is an insight about the moral nature of virtue and happiness, so knowledge of happiness clearly has practical value insofar as it helps to limit injustice. The insight will help to maintain the level of virtue in the state by setting limits on the

pursuit of external goods, without which the state will be worse off. If the citizens believe happiness lies in the possession of external goods, they are likely to seek to accumulate as much of these goods as possible. The wealthy will accumulate more wealth, and the powerful will gather more power. These goods can only be gotten at the expense of their fellow citizens. Therefore, acting according to such an idea of happiness, the citizens are likely to harm each other and the whole city, even going so far as to commit murder or theft when they are able to with impunity. They are likely to use wealth or power only for their own advantage, and a city composed of such citizens will tend toward the extreme forms of oligarchy or democracy that Aristotle analyzes in *Politics* IV.4-6. Such constitutional forms work against the common good because they do not function as organic wholes. Tyranny is the natural product of thinking that happiness is in the possession of external goods. To the extent that the citizens take to heart the insight that virtue and happiness are not an abundance of honor and wealth, they will not make these their final ends. The insight will tend to mitigate the drive toward these external goods.

Insofar as my interpretation finds practical value in the insight provided by tragedy, I am in agreement with Lord's thesis that tragedy has a beneficial moral effect. As he reads Aristotle, spirit is a valuable and necessary force in the ideal state, but also has the potential to create faction among the citizens. On my interpretation, tragedy shows that happiness is not holding office and receiving honor from other citizens – it is not satisfying spirit. With this realization, the drive for honor motivated by spirit will be kept under restraint, and the citizens will be less likely to work against the common good. I therefore agree with Lord about the practical benefit of tragedy, that it limits the citizens' drive for honor.

What I find problematic with Lord's argument is that it does not account for the superiority of the contemplative over the practical value of tragedy in Aristotle's view. The practical benefit of tragedy is secondary to its function of giving the citizens an intellectual insight valuable for its own sake. Aristotle argues in *Politics* VII.15 that a proper leisure activity contributes to practical virtue (1334a31-34), but is not for the sake of practical virtue. If we are to understand Aristotle's argument, we must come to see how an insight about the moral nature of virtue and happiness is contemplative.

My project is to show how tragedy is philosophical by inspiring contemplation in the citizens. We might doubt that knowledge of the moral dimension of human character can be contemplative, because it does not appear to fit into Aristotle's division of contemplative knowledge into physics, mathematics, and theology in the *Metaphysics* (*Metaphysics* E 1026a19-20). Knowledge of virtue belongs to none of these sciences. Furthermore, the insight that virtue is moral might be understood as a part of the moral education of the citizens. If this is so, it is hard to see how tragedy is contemplative in any meaningful sense. Tragedy would turn out to be only for the sake of moral education, whereas I argued in the first chapter that tragedy fulfills Aristotle's requirement of a kind of music that is for its own sake. Tragedy is supposed to provide leisure with διαγωγή, not moral education, which the citizens must already be provided with prior to the leisure activity they enjoy as adults of the best possible city.

Though it obviously has practical value, knowledge of the moral nature of man has a contemplative dimension as well. First, this knowledge is valuable primarily for its own sake because it is the result of an investigation into an impasse, as I have shown. Aristotle argues in *Metaphysics* A that wisdom is sought only for its own sake because it is the result of an inquiry

into the cause of an impasse. The motivation for the inquiry conditions the value of the insight gained through the inquiry. If as I argue a tragic impasse naturally inspires a desire to know, the insight that results must also be valued for its own sake, analogously to wisdom in metaphysics.

For knowledge to be valuable for its own sake is to be contemplative knowledge. In *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2 Aristotle separates all knowledge into the categories of contemplative or theoretical, practical, and productive. Practical wisdom is a true practical state of reason regarding what is good and bad for a human being (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1140b4-6). Productive knowledge is art (τέχνη), the end of which is the external product (1140a10-14). Both these kinds of knowledge aim at least partially at externals, and therefore are not entirely for their own sakes. Productive knowledge is for the sake of what it produces, e.g. shoes or a ship. Practical knowledge is for its own sake insofar as it aims at its own exercise, but it involves toilsome involvement with externals such as wealth. Only contemplative knowledge is purely for its own sake. The insight into the moral dimension must therefore be in some way contemplative.

Although practical philosophy is of course practical, it has a theoretical and contemplative dimension. Purely practical knowledge is deliberative knowledge of how to achieve an end, but the first principles of practical philosophy are not the objects of deliberation; they are known theoretically. Aristotle's ethics begins from an account of human happiness derived from his account of human nature. To be human is to be capable of reasoning, and living well means reasoning well. These are theoretical claims. The practical side of practical philosophy is therefore based on a theoretical starting point. I suggest we think of the insight as a part of the theoretical first principles of Aristotle's practical philosophy. The insight that man is a moral being lies at the same level of thought as that of the definitions of virtue and happiness.

Arguably, the insight is necessary for a practical philosophy that makes reason the first principle, because a rational agent is only capable of reasoning well or poorly if reason is not entirely determined by external circumstances. To act voluntarily is to acting according to an internal principle (1110a15-18), and reason is internal to the soul. It is not possible to acting according to reason if it is not possible to act according to what is internal. Likewise, the realization that being human means being morally responsible reinforces the guiding role of reason. If we believe that action is not entirely dictated by externals but springs from an internal source, we will have to strive to reason well about how to live. The insight forces a person to act rather than simply following whatever external influences are at play. This is not to deny the power for external influences for good or bad, but only to make the point that a rational agent must think and act in a way that is partly up to their own initiative.

The insight is wondrous as an insight about human nature. It is an insight about the soul, one of the more wondrous things (θαυμασιωτέρων, *De Anima* 402a3) about which we could have knowledge. Tragedy shows us that there is a side of human nature that is not exhausted by external, visible action. Although in undermining the tendency to identify virtue with external goods tragedy shows that the hero is not virtuous, the insight makes the tragedy wondrous in a different way insofar as it shows that the hero's moral status is a stable condition underlying their action. *Oedipus Rex* and the *Iliad* are wondrous without a genuine contradiction in the hero because they manifest the power of someone like Oedipus or Achilles to act in a way that brings about drastically conflicting consequences. Oedipus is wondrous to the extent that he is able to act in a way that is both profoundly good and profoundly bad. These narratives display a nobility in their heroes despite their ruin and their own moral limitations. This wonder is only

possible if there is an inner character that remains noble in contrast to the hero's ruin. If the hero loses all nobility in their ruin, we cannot see them as noble in the end. The resolution of the initial contradiction produces contemplative wonder by showing that Oedipus has an inner dimension capable of action that is paradoxically noble and ruinous. Again, this nobility and wonder are implicit in Homer, but the insight into the ethical dimension of the soul bring them into focus. Tragedy therefore remains wondrous even after the impasse is resolved. The audience's thinking thus ends as well as it begins with wonder.

Finally, the insight is the outcome of a philosophical inquiry, and as a pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, such an inquiry is already a degree of happiness. The effect of watching tragedy, recognizing the tragic problem, and reflecting deeply on it is motivated by the desire to know simply for the sake of knowing, as are the philosophical inquiries Aristotle mentions in *Metaphysics* A.2. This activity makes tragedy philosophical in a sense derivative from that of philosophy proper, i.e. metaphysics. I do not claim to be able to show that the citizens will necessarily come to see virtue as distinctly moral. Tragedy leaves the internal dimension of human nature implicit. Nonetheless, it opens up the possibility of thinking of virtue as moral, and in doing so, gives the citizens a view of the moral dimension of character. By inspiring this pursuit of knowledge and vision of human nature, tragedy provides the content for a philosophical leisure.

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