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# Plato on Popular Poetry

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Philosophy

by

Sarah Ruth Jansen

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Plato on Popular Poetry

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Gavin Lawrence, Chair

The orthodox view is that Plato is hostile toward poetry and that his antagonism is at bottom motivated by his metaphysical commitment to the Forms. I argue instead that Plato is a poetry revisionist, who compellingly critiques popular Greek poetry. Whereas popular Greek poetry fosters illusions of virtue and value, reformed poetry, which includes Plato's own dramatic dialogues, produces accurate images of virtue and value. I argue, further, that Plato's theory of audience psychology applies to moviegoers and that this has implications for the impact of film on adults and philosophical theories of audience response more generally.

The dissertation of Sarah Ruth Jansen is approved.

John Carriero

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2012

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents, Bill and Ruth Jansen, whose love, patience, kindness and confidence in me have fortified me in all my endeavors. I will always cherish your warmth, conversation and playful sense of humor.

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## PREFACE

My thesis has four parts: (1) in the *Republic* Socrates does not attack or ban poetry on metaphysical grounds, because it is a “likeness of a likeness” of the Forms; (2) in the *Republic* Socrates critiques popular Greek poetry (in particular, tragedy) on purely ethical grounds, because it corrupts the soul by producing illusions of virtue and value; (3) Plato (in the *Republic* and perhaps beyond) is a poetry revisionist and advocates ethical poetry, aimed at benefitting the soul; and (4) the audience psychology that underpins Socrates' critique of popular Greek poetry is philosophically and empirically plausible and provides a superior alternative to (a) contemporary psychological theories of how violent films affect audiences and (b) philosophical pretense theories of audience response.

In chapters 1 and 2 I set out to establish the first two components of my thesis, as well as to interpret and explicate Plato's theory of audience response more generally. Although I make some critical remarks in these chapters, a full evaluation of Plato's theory of audience psychology is reserved for chapter 4, wherein I argue for the fourth part of my thesis. In chapter 3 I defend the third part of my thesis, which provides further support for the first two parts of my thesis. As a poetry revisionist, Plato does not (nor could he) attack or banish poetry on metaphysical grounds; rather, Plato is primarily concerned with the ethical content of poetry and its effect on the souls of audience members.

In chapter 1 I examine the irrational part of the soul, which popular Greek poetry is said to appeal to. I argue that popular Greek poetry interacts with the improperly trained spirited and

appetitive parts of Greek viewers' souls to co-produce illusions of virtue and value. Thus, as opposed to devaluing images as such on metaphysical grounds, Socrates opposes illusions or inaccurate images of virtue and value. Moreover, these “axiological” images of Greek poetry are illusions not in virtue of their metaphysical relationship to the Forms, but rather in virtue of their being jointly produced by an ignorant poet and an ignorant part of Greek viewers' souls, which, due to its improper conditioning (cultural or otherwise), *believes* the axiological illusions that it perceives in Greek poetry.

In chapter 2 I provide further arguments for my claim that the *Republic's* arguments against Greek poetry are not metaphysically motivated – i.e., are not grounded in Plato's commitment to the view that images constitute likenesses of likenesses of the Forms. In this chapter I provide an overview of different scholarly accounts of Plato's supposed metaphysical devaluation of poetry, demonstrating that each is inadequate, in that each ultimately fails to respect important distinctions that Socrates makes between accurate images and inaccurate images (illusions) and between mimesis and a pejorative “art of imitation” [μίμητική], which produces illusions in concert with the irrational part of the soul. By respecting these distinction, I show how my interpretation can resolve interpretive puzzles associated with the *Republic* – for example, how the tragedian's images of virtue are removed from truth in such a way so as to corrupt the soul, why Plato only bans some poetry, how mimesis in Book III relates to mimesis in Book X, etc.

In chapter III I argue that Plato's *Phaedo* is an exemplar of the sort of reformed poetry he conceives of in *Republic* III and X. The *Phaedo* is a dramatic mimesis of the last day of Socrates; however, it constitutes good mimesis because it accurately represents virtue and value with a view to making its audience better. This provides support for the third part of my thesis (namely,

that Plato is a poetry revisionist), as well as reinforces the first two parts of my thesis. The fact that Plato opposes the ethical content (rather than the metaphysical status) of Greek dramatic poetry is confirmed by the fact that Plato himself composes dramas that differ from traditional Greek drama in their ethical content and psychological aim, rather than in their metaphysical status. The *Phaedo* also provides additional support for my claim, developed in chapters 1 and 4, that Plato does not oppose Greek drama simply because it evokes emotions in audiences. The *Phaedo* intends to elicit emotions; however, it aims to beneficially shape the manner and content of audience members' emotions. In contrast, according to Socrates, Greek tragedy encourages its audience to (a) express emotions in an unhealthy way (i.e., immoderately and self-indulgently) and (b) express emotions constituted by irrational beliefs about virtue and value. Thus, the *Phaedo* not only reveals Plato's revisionist stance toward poetry but also illuminates some of the finer points of Plato's audience psychology.

In chapter 4 I continue the project of interpreting Plato's audience psychology and general model of how drama corrupts audiences, but with a view to assessing its empirical and philosophical plausibility. In particular, I explicate the role of “sympathy” in Plato's audience psychology. Sympathy, as Plato conceives of it, allows for a degree of psychological distance between the audience member and the characters of the drama, which reflects the fact that audience members are not as imaginatively absorbed in a character as an actor is. I argue, further, that it is through the mechanisms of sympathy and pleasure that audience members are psychologically corrupted by certain dramas. Specifically, it is through repeatedly sympathizing with vicious characters that audience members emotionally express and enjoy emotionally expressing the perspective of their improperly trained arational part, with the result that they are conditioned to express their irrational perspective in real life, in their thoughts, emotions and

behaviors. In the interest of assessing the empirical plausibility of Plato's theory, I apply Plato's model to certain sorts of violent films, arguing that Plato's position offers an attractive middle ground in current academic and popular debates about the effects of violent films on audiences, which are polarized between the view that violent films cause viewers to behave violently and the view that viewers' preexisting violent predispositions cause them to behave violently. Plato's model demonstrates how both the viewer's predispositions and the drama make distinct, causal contributions toward altering the viewer's real life attitudes and behaviors; by co-producing axiological illusions about violence in concert with a viewer's *non-dominant*, arational disposition to regard violence in unhealthy ways, films that foster axiological illusions about violence can make a non-dominant disposition toward violence become dominant. Additionally, in assessing the philosophical plausibility of Plato's model, I consider reasons for thinking that (a) there is an irrational component of the human psyche that is capable of belief or something like belief and (b) audience members genuinely express at least some emotions in the theater. In the process of defending b, I provide an argument against fully pretense models of audience response, according to which audience members' emotional responses are all part of a simulation or a game of make-believe.

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## CHAPTER 1

# The Irrational Part of the Soul

In *Republic* IV Socrates divides the soul into three parts – reason, spirit and appetite. In *Republic* IX Socrates distinguishes each part by appeal to its characteristic object (or objects) of desire (580d-581b). The appetitive part is the source of desires for bodily satisfaction and also the desire for money, since “such appetites are most easily satisfied by means of money” (581a1); the spirited part is the source of desires for control, victory and high repute (581a10); and the rational part is the source of desires for truth, learning and wisdom (581b6-10). Puzzlingly, despite numerous back references to the tripartite theory of the soul (595a5-b1, 602e8-9, 603d3-6), *Republic* X introduces a bipartite division; the soul is now comprised of a rational part, which forms beliefs on the basis of calculation, and an irrational part, which forms beliefs on the basis of appearances. How are we to reconcile Book X's cognitive division of the soul with the motivational division proposed in earlier books?

In the first part of this chapter I consider, and ultimately reject, various proposed solutions to this problem. I submit, instead, that the irrational part is equivalent to uneducated or improperly educated spirit and appetite – i.e., spirit and appetite as they occur in a corrupt or partially corrupt soul. In the second part of this chapter I discuss the repercussions of this discovery for the tripartite psychology and audience psychology of the *Republic* – and, especially, the role of spirit and appetite therein.

### I. The Irrational Part and the Tripartite Soul

Some commentators construe the irrational part as a *new* part of the soul – either an

unspecified part<sup>1</sup> or else a perceiving part.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Socrates alludes to the possibility of “parts in between” other parts of the soul (443d7), twice remarking that the tripartite theory of the soul is not a precise answer to the question of how many parts the soul contains (435c9-d8, 504b1-c4). However, this interpretation is difficult to reconcile with the start of Book X, wherein Socrates says that “now that we have distinguished the separate parts [εἶδη] of the soul, it is even clearer, I think, that all such poetry should be altogether excluded”<sup>3</sup> (595a5-b1). So, far from introducing a new psychic division, Socrates relies on an existing one.

Hence, most commentators attempt to connect Book X's bipartite division to the earlier tripartite division. One such attempt – favored by Murphy, Nehamas and Burnyeat<sup>4</sup> - analyzes the rational-irrational division as a division of the rational part of the soul. This interpretation receives support from a not unnatural reading of lines 602e3-5. After noting that human beings are susceptible to optical illusions, Socrates say:

But often when this part [reason] has measured and has indicated that some things are larger or smaller or the same size as others, the opposite appears to it at the same time.  
[Τούτω δὲ πολλάκις μετρήσαντι καὶ σημαίνοντι μείζω ἅττα εἶναι ἢ ἐλάττω ἕτερα ἐτέρων ἢ ἴσα τὰναντία φαίνεται ἅμα περὶ ταῦτά.]

Socrates next appeals to the principle that the same thing cannot simultaneously believe opposites about the same thing, concluding that “the part of the soul that forms a belief contrary to the measurements couldn't be the same as the part that believes in accord with them” (602e10-

1 Janaway 1995, 144.

2 Shields 2010, 147-170; Burnyeat 1999, 224-225.

3 Throughout I use the Grube and Reeve 1992 translation of the *Republic*, unless otherwise noted.

4 Murphy 1951, 239-241; Nehamas 1982, 64-68; and Burnyeat, 223-225. These commentators maintain that while painting appeals to the irrational part of reason, poetry appeals to a different part – e.g., appetite (Burnyeat, 225), appetite and spirit (Nehamas, 67 & 78) or else “detrimental emotions” and our “tendency to indulge emotion excessively” (Murphy, 241). However, this move fails, because Socrates clearly thinks that painting and poetry appeal to the *same part* of the soul at 605b6-c3. See Singpurwalla 2011, 290.



603a1). So, it might seem as though Socrates divides reason into two parts; namely, a part that forms beliefs on the basis of perceptual appearances and a part that forms beliefs on the basis of calculative reasoning.

This interpretation suffers from obvious difficulties; most notably, Socrates never explicitly maintains that reason has two parts and even initially defines reason as the “reasoning” or “calculating” [λογίζεταί] part of the soul (439d4-5). In any case, the referent of “τάναντία” (in the above passage) is ambiguous. “The opposite” [τάναντία] might refer to the optical illusion; however, it could equally denote reason's calculations, in which case the sense of the passage would be as follows: when reason has calculated, the opposite (of the optical illusion) appears to it at the same time (as the optical illusion appears to the irrational part).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, even if we suppose that “τάναντία” refers to an optical illusion which “appears” [φαίνεται] to reason, it does not follow that reason “believes” [δοξάζει] said illusion, experiencing opposing beliefs as a result. Socrates could equally be assuming that whatever appears to reason must be believed in some *other* part of the soul.

For these reasons, most commentators envision the irrational part as either equivalent to appetite<sup>6</sup> or else appetite and spirit.<sup>7</sup> In support of this interpretation, they commonly cite the language Socrates uses to characterize the irrational part, which is reminiscent of appetite and spirit. According to Socrates, the irrational part “hungers for the satisfactions of weeping and

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5 Adam 1902 (1965 reprint), 408 & 466-467.

6 See, for example, Burnyeat 1999, 225. Cf. Penner 1971, 111-113. Penner goes so far as to insist that Plato only introduces the spirited part in Book IV for ad hoc reasons, mainly to preserve the analogy between city and soul.

7 This latter view seems to be more popular. See Adam 1902, 406; Moss 2007, 439; Lorenz 2006, 65. However, these commentators are not explicit about the way in which poetry (and, in particular, tragedy) appeals to spirit. As Singpurwalla 2011 notes, this remains to be explained (297).

sufficiently lamenting, being by nature such as to have appetites [ἐπιθυμεῖν] for these things.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Socrates calls the irrational part “multicolored” [ποικίλον] (605a5) – a description earlier applied to the appetitive part (588c7). The irrational part also possesses qualities associated with spirit. So, for instance, in appealing to the irrational part of the soul, imitative poetry not only “nurtures and waters” appetites but also anger [θυμός], whose source is the spirited part [τὸ θυμοειδής] of the soul (606d, 439e). That imitative poetry appeals to spirit, in addition to appetite, receives further confirmation at 604e-605a. Therein, Socrates claims that imitative poets imitate the “irritable” [ἀγανακτητικόν] character and in so doing appeal to the “irritable part” [τὸ ἀγανακτητικόν] of the soul. Tellingly, Socrates earlier associates spirit with “irritability” [δυσκολία] (590a8). Thus, the irrational part of the soul, which imitative poetry appeals to, is likely comprised of appetite and spirit.

Even so, as we have seen, commentators resist identifying the irrational part with spirit and/or appetite. This resistance is rooted in a particular account of appetite, according to which appetites are blind impulses or “good-independent desires” - i.e., desires that are not constituted or attended by the belief that their object is, in some sense, good.<sup>9</sup> Since, on this construal of appetite, appetites do not involve beliefs, it follows that appetite is necessarily distinct from the irrational, “illusion believing” part of the soul.<sup>10</sup>

However, the “blind impulse” view of appetite has been challenged in recent years. Commentators increasingly point out that in the *Republic* Socrates attributes beliefs – including beliefs about the good - to appetite (571d1, 505d11-e1, 560b7-c3, 554c12-d3).<sup>11</sup> Also, the

8 Here I use the translation of Moss 2007, 439 (footnote 39).

9 Murphy 1951 puts it succinctly: “τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν is a source of original attractions and repulsions, blind impulses to obtain or avoid ...” (42). Irwin 1995 calls appetitive desires “good-independent” (208-209).

10 So, Nehamas 1982, 65 remarks, “Why should our *desire* tell us that the immersed stick is bent?”

11 See, most recently, Singpurwalla 2011, 291-293. Cf. Carone, 2001.

passage commonly cited in support of the blind impulse view of appetites (i.e., 437d-439a) does not obviously contain a denial of the position that an appetite for X subsumes a belief that X is good. Rather, the passage contains a denial that thirst is an appetite set over drink of a “certain sort” [ποιοῦ τινοῦς], *including* “good drink.” The point is that thirst qua thirst is an appetite set over drink simpliciter. In fact, at 474c7-9 Socrates refers back to this passage to argue analogically that the philosopher's desire for wisdom, qua a desire for wisdom, is not set over a part of wisdom but rather the whole of wisdom (475b). We do not therefore conclude that the philosopher's desire for wisdom is a blind urge, nor should we in the case of appetites.

That said, the *Republic* does not contain an explicit formulation of the view that appetites subsume a belief in the goodness of their objects.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Book X is commonly cited as evidence of Socrates' supposed adherence to this view.<sup>13</sup> However, such appeals to Book X rely on the assumption that it is appetite – and not spirit – that uncritically accepts Greek poetry's illusions of goodness and badness. In what follows, I argue that spirit (and, in particular, *improperly trained* spirit) uncritically believes Greek poetry's illusions of goodness and badness. In contrast, appetite desires to physically express spirit's beliefs. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that appetite's desire to outwardly express spirit's beliefs is constituted by the judgment that its object is choice-worthy.

We are now in a position to examine how Book X's cognitive division of the soul relates to the earlier motivational division. The part of the soul that uncritically accepts appearances desires objects which appear good to it. Importantly, that which appears good to the irrational part does so in virtue of its nature, not in virtue of any reasoned calculations of longterm benefit. Hence, according to Socrates, poetry's “axiological appearances” (i.e., appearances of goodness

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12 In fact, in the *Timaeus* appetite is said to be completely devoid of beliefs [δόξα] (77b).

13 See, for example, Lorenz 2006, 59-73.

and badness) are the “joint progeny” of the drama *and* the viewer's irrational part. In other words, the irrational part not only uncritically accepts appearances, it also co-produces appearances.<sup>14</sup>

The recurrent use of sexual terminology serves to emphasize this point. For example, the imitative art [μιμητική] “has intercourse with” [προσομιλεῖ] the irrational part (603a9-11). Each is a “courtesan” [ἑταίρα] to the other. The imitative art is an inferior thing [φάυλη] which, “having intercourse with” [συγγιγνομένη] with an inferior thing (i.e., the irrational part), “begets” [γεννᾷ] inferior offspring (603b3-4). As we shall see, the sort of appearances that the irrational part co-begets and accepts is largely determined by its motivational orientations.

In sum, Book X's irrational-rational division maps onto the earlier tripartite division; the irrational part is comprised of spirit and appetite. However, the fact that Greek poetry appeals to spirit and appetite is insufficient to explain why it corrupts the soul - a point not appreciated by commentators.<sup>15</sup> In fact, according to Socrates, poetry of the right sort trains the pre-rational parts of the young soul (i.e., spirit and appetite) to harmonize with reason (401e-402a) – to, in effect, have the same motivational orientations as reason.

However, popular Greek drama does not operate on the adult psyche in this way; in particular, it does not positively shape the spirited and appetitive parts of adult viewers, at least not by determining their motivational orientations. Rather, it appeals to and strengthens uneducated or improperly educated spirit and appetite – i.e., spirit and appetite as they occur in a corrupt or partially corrupt adult soul. To see this, consider that Socrates accuses Greek poetry of corrupting the vicious majority and “decent men” [ἐπιεικεῖς], not fully virtuous individuals

<sup>14</sup> See Harte 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Belfiore 1983 is the exception. However, for reasons already enumerated, I disagree with her conclusion that the irrational-rational division represents a new division of the soul – in her view, an “inferior” part of all three parts. While I agree that the irrational part reflects the vices of appetite and spirit, there is no reason to therefore conclude that Socrates introduces a *new* part of the soul.

(602a, 605c). The decent man falls short of full virtue, as evidenced by his susceptibility to psychic conflict [στάσις]. For example, when misfortune befalls the decent man, he experiences an appetitive desire to lament and an opposing desire to keep quiet. This inner opposition constitutes psychic conflict [στάσις], as opposed to mere opposition, due to the manner of its resolution. When in the presence of others, the decent man's spirit, fearing shame, “fights” [μάχεται] and overpowers his appetitive desire to lament (603e-604a); and when the man is alone, his appetitive desire to lament overpowers his rational inclination to keep quiet (603e-604a).<sup>16</sup> In both cases, psychic opposition progresses into psychic conflict, because desires “fight” and ultimately overpower each other. In contrast, in the harmonious soul of the virtuous individual, psychic opposition is resolved peacefully; reason “persuades” appetite and/or spirit to “follow” it<sup>17</sup> - most likely by generating images which rechannel the opposing desires of appetite

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16 While Socrates does not explicitly say that spirit fights and overpowers the decent man's appetitive desire to lament, this can be inferred. Since spirit, qua the honor-loving part of the soul, desires to preserve the agent's honor, it naturally opposes the decent man's appetitive desire to shamefully lament in the presence of his equals. However, when the decent man is alone, spirit does not oppose this appetitive urge to lament, since the agent's honor is no longer threatened. In contrast, reason, if operative, always opposes the the decent man's appetitive urge to lament, since the rational disinclination to lament arises not from social considerations but rather from the calculation that the present event is not all that bad in the grand scheme of things and should be met with practical reason, not lamentation (604b-c). Presumably, when alone the decent man is overcome by his appetitive desire to lament, because reason requires spirit, its henchman, to battle the strong, appetitive desire to lament.

17 In Book IX Socrates opposes the peaceful rule of reason - wherein appetite and spirit “follow knowledge and argument,” having been tamed and cultivated by reason - to the forceful rule of appetite and spirit (586d-587a, 588b-589b). Also, in Book VIII the appetite-ruled oligarch is faulted for resorting to “compulsion and fear” to keep his better appetites in control of his worse ones, instead of “persuading and taming” his appetites with “arguments” (554c-d). The clear implication is that while the appetitive part rules by means of overpowering the other parts, the rational part rules by caring for the community of the parts and by persuading them to follow it.

or spirit.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the harmonious soul is less likely to experience psychic opposition to begin with, because its appetitive and spirited parts are trained to desire that which reason approves and to detest that which reason opposes (401e-402a) – i.e., to have the same motivational orientation as reason. Thus, the decent man's propensity to undergo psychic conflict is symptomatic of his improperly trained appetite and spirit.

I am not suggesting that training fully determines the nature of the appetitive and spirited parts. The character of spirit and appetite is determined by nurture *and* nature. So, for example, future guardians are selected partly on the basis of their natural temperaments, especially the politically adventitious disposition of their spirited part, which causes them to be gentle to citizens and harsh to political enemies (375b-376c). Nevertheless, Socrates acknowledges the enormous role of upbringing – particularly familial, economic, social and cultural influences – in conditioning or educating appetite and spirit. As *Republic* VIII and IX make clear, the appetitive and spirited parts of increasingly corrupt souls are increasingly uncultivated and bestial, as a direct result of familial, economic, social and cultural forces.<sup>19</sup> Thus, when I refer to “improperly educated” or “improperly trained” appetite or spirit, I mean to pick out a part of the soul that is

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18 This seems to be the view taken up in the *Philebus*, which introduces “a painter who follows the scribe and provides illustrations to his words in the soul” (39b5-6) (Frede trans. in Cooper and Hutchinson 1997). When the scribe is reason, the pictures are true; and these true pictures influence the lower parts of the soul. See Lorenz 2006, 101-110 for this interpretation of the *Philebus*. According to Lorenz, the *Philebus* solves the problem of how reason “persuades” the arational parts of the soul, which cannot understand rational arguments. In any case, the beginning of such a view is already implicit in the *Republic*. The philosopher-kings use an image – i.e., the Noble Lie or the Myth of Metals – to instill beliefs in the populace (414b-415c). Given that reason is the psychological correlate of the philosopher-kings, it is likely that reason also uses images to persuade the psychological correlate of the populace – i.e., spirit and appetite.

19 See Books VIII-IX, especially 588b-591b.

improperly conditioned (i.e., not motivationally aligned with reason) in virtue of either (or both) natural and social factors.

Notably, the irrational part resembles improperly conditioned appetite and spirit. Irritability and irascibility are associated with uneducated or improperly educated spirit (411b6-7) – i.e., spirit as it occurs in an inharmonious soul (590a8-b1). In addition, the “unnecessary” (i.e., not beneficial) desire to lament belongs to uncultivated appetite, in which “savage heads” have been allowed to grow.<sup>20</sup> Hence, lamentation is associated with the tyrannical constitution, which swarms with a multitude of unnecessary desires (578a). In contrast to uneducated or improperly educated spirit and appetite (which is said to always oppose reason), educated spirit and appetite are *like* reason and “harmonize” with reason (590d, 402a). Thus, due to its irritability, unnecessary desires and general propensity to oppose reason, the irrational part resembles untrained or ill-trained appetite and spirit.

This has important repercussions for Plato's audience psychology, as it pertains to adults. In strengthening uneducated or improperly educated spirit and appetite, popular Greek poetry corrupts an adult *who is already partially corrupt*.<sup>21</sup> In the next section, I will investigate how Greek tragedy “appeals to” uneducated or improperly educated spirit and appetite. In so doing, I hope to shed light on both the audience psychology and tripartite psychology of the *Republic*,

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20 See 589b. Throughout Books VIII and IX unnecessary appetites are described as savage and bestial, in contrast to necessary appetites, which are required for the continued existence of the agent. Notably, it is the satisfaction of unnecessary appetites that motivates the introduction of a more luxurious kallipolis, to replace the “city of pigs,” wherein only strictly necessary appetites are satisfied (372a-373e). The fact that the ultimate kallipolis is constructed so as to satisfy at least some unnecessary desires suggests that unnecessary desires are, in some sense, “natural” - i.e., they grow naturally in many men's souls.

21 Burnyeat 1999, 249-255 makes this point, though he does not specify the sense in which the soul is already partially corrupt.

especially the role of spirit and appetite therein.

## II. The Role of Spirit in Plato's Audience Psychology

There are *prima facie* reasons for thinking that spirit plays an essential role in the audience psychology of Book X. In the discussion of poetry in Books II-III Socrates proposes that music and poetry be introduced into the guardians' early education so as to soften whatever “spirit” [θυμοειδής] the young guardians possess, tempering it like hot iron and making it useful (411a8-10). Socrates seems to suppose that Homeric poetry has the opposite effect on youth, as evidenced by his sustained critique of Homeric depictions of the hero Achilles.<sup>22</sup> Homer's Achilles is irascible, stubborn, insubordinate, arrogant, savage, etc. - in short, the exemplar of a man whose thumos is hardened and useless.<sup>23</sup> Adolescents must not imitate Achilles or similar characters, lest such imitations “become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought” (395d1-2). In other words, in providing irascible and savage role models for imitation, popular Greek poetry hardens and animalizes the spirited part of the adolescent soul.<sup>24</sup> Thus, we should take Socrates seriously when, in Book X, he suggests that popular drama affects the spirited part of the adult psyche.

Before we examine the sense in which Greek poetry (specifically, tragic drama) appeals to improperly trained spirit, we must first appreciate that tragic poetry corrupts audiences by enlisting them to believe axiological illusions. According to Socrates, tragedy appeals to the irrational part of the soul, “which leads us to dwell on our misfortunes and to lamentation, and that can never get enough of these things” (604d6-8). In lamenting for the tragic hero, audience

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22 From 379d to 391e there are sixteen references to Achilles or his speeches, fourteen of which are critical.

23 See Hobbs 2000, 199-209 for the argument that Achilles is Socrates' exemplar of “thumos run amok.”

24 The reason that this is not explicitly stated in the text is that Socrates has not yet distinguished between the three parts of the soul.



members satisfy their appetitive hunger for weeping and wailing (605d, 606a). Furthermore, this appetitive desire to lament is accompanied by a reason-opposed belief in “illusory images” [εἶδολα, φαντάσματα, φαινόμενα].<sup>25</sup> This becomes manifest at 605b6-c3, wherein Socrates remarks that:

... an imitative poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by making images [εἶδωλα] that are far removed from truth and by gratifying an irrational part, which cannot distinguish the large and the small but believes [ἡγουμένῳ] that the same things are large at one time and small at another.

In other words, tragedy arouses and gratifies appetite's desire for lamentation *by* making illusions, which the irrational part believes. Throughout *Republic X*, Socrates draws on a parallel between shadow painting [σκιαγραφία] and Greek poetry.<sup>26</sup> According to Socrates, the shadow painter appeals to the irrational part of the soul by producing optical illusions. In particular, the shadow painter uses shading and coloring to produce the visual illusion of depth within the field of the painting, thereby creating the illusion that apparently nearby objects are large and apparently faraway objects are small (602c).<sup>27</sup> Importantly, this optical illusion is the joint

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25 The terms “εἶδολα,” “φαντάσματα” and “φαινόμενα” often denote deceptive or spurious images. See Janaway 1995, 110-111. Cf. Halliwell 1988, 118-119. In the next chapter I argue that Socrates targets *illusory* images (rather than images per se) in Book X. Note the complete absence in Book X of the neutral term for “image” (i.e., “εἰκόν”) employed in the divided line passage (509d-511e).

26 Many commentators have found this parallel puzzling. See, for example, Annas 1982. The term “σκιαγραφία” refers to a kind of painting that involves breaking up the surfaces of a painting into tiny areas of contrasting color, which, when viewed from a distance, appear blended. In other words, it is like pointillism. This form of painting also involves using shading or coloring to create the visual illusion of depth within the field of the painting. See Keuls 1978, esp. 59-87.

27 Hence, it is because shadow painting exploits a “weakness in our nature” – i.e., our propensity to be deceived by colors and by distances – that shadow painting has “powers that our little short of magical” (602c-d) and can deceive a part of the soul “which cannot distinguish the large and the small but believes that the same things are

offspring of the irrational part of the soul and the painting. It is precisely because the perceiver is prone, in virtue of her irrational part, to view certain two-dimensional combinations of shades and colors as three-dimensional and to view seemingly nearby objects as large and seemingly faraway objects as small that shadow painting is able to produce its effect; namely, the visual illusion of depth and consequent illusory perception of differing sizes based on the illusion of depth.<sup>28</sup>

For Socrates, Greek tragedy is instrumental in producing a different sort of illusions; namely, axiological illusions. To see this, consider that Socrates focuses on the tragedian's depiction of a hero lamenting his misfortune. Socrates notes that when misfortune befalls the decent man, his irrational inclination to lament is normally countered by his rational inclination to “resist his pain” (604a-b). According to Socrates, underlying this rational inclination is a *belief* in the calculation that the present misfortune is not obviously bad in the grand scheme of things and that deliberation (not lamentation) is the best course of action (604b-c). However, when in the theater, the decent man relaxes his reason, because he discerns no danger in bewailing “for another man” (606a-b). Similarly, in the visual case, one's irrational belief in an optical illusion is normally countered by a rational belief in calculations of size, weight, shape, etc.<sup>29</sup> However,

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large at one time and small at another” (605c1-3).

28 Although Plato most likely thinks that σκιαγραφία produces illusions of size (602c6-7, 605c1-3), it is not clear that he thinks of this feature as unique to σκιαγραφία. So, in Book X Socrates also employs neutral terms for painting or the painter – e.g., “γραφικός” at 603b10 and “ζωγράφος” at 597b11. In chapter 2 I explain this shift in focus (i.e., the shift from painting more generally to σκιαγραφία in particular), arguing that a parallel shift occurs with regard to poetry; Socrates initially defines and discusses poetry in general, only later defining and discussing imitative [μιμητική] poetry in particular.

29 Why suppose that a part of the soul *believes* the optical illusions that appear to it? I address this question in chapter 4.

when viewing a skiagraphic painting, one is ruled by appearances, not calculations.

Thus, for the analogy with painting and the visual sphere to work, tragedy would need to produce an axiological illusion, which would counter reason's assessment of goodness and badness. In particular, tragedy would need to produce the axiological illusion that the hero's present misfortune is a terrible calamity, to which lamentation is a choice-worthy response. And indeed, in Book III Socrates indicates that tragedy produces an illusion of this sort. Specifically, Socrates says that poetic depictions of heroes lamenting suggest that (a) death or loss of external goods is terrible [*δεινόν*] (387d-e) and (b) lamentation is a “worthy” [*ἄξιον*] response to personal misfortune (388d). As in the visual case, the illusion is the joint progeny of the poem and the viewer. It is precisely because the audience member is disposed, in virtue of his irrational part, to view the hero as noble and attractive that the poem is able to produce the illusion that the hero's lamentation is a “worthy” response to personal misfortune. (Moreover, the apparent lamentation-worthiness of the hero's misfortune produces the appearance of its huge terribleness.) Also, it is precisely because the audience member is disposed, in virtue of his irrational part, to perceive personal misfortune as terrible that the poem is able to produce the illusion that the hero's misfortune is hugely terrible. (I will defend these points more fully shortly, when I examine how tragedy interacts with improperly trained spirit.)

The view that tragedy induces its audience to believe axiological illusions receives ample support in the literature.<sup>30</sup> However, what is less clear is the role of appetite - and especially spirit - in producing tragedy's axiological illusions. This unclarity is partly due to the fact that most commentators do not appreciate that the irrational part not only believes tragedy's axiological illusions but is also instrumental in producing them.<sup>31</sup> The irrational part is not a part of the soul

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30 See White 1979, 256-257; Belfiore 1983; Ferrari 1989; Singpurwalla 2011; and Lorenz 2006, 59-73.

31 The exception Harte 2010.

that believes any and all appearances; rather, it is a part of the soul that co-produces and believes appearances *of a certain sort*, in virtue of its motivational orientation, which is determined by nature and nurture. So, attention must be paid to both the character of improperly educated spirit and appetite as well as to the beliefs that tragedy elicits in audiences.

Citing parallels with the *Protagoras*, Jessica Moss argues that tragedy appeals primarily to appetite, which judges goodness and badness by the false standard of pleasure.<sup>32</sup> Setting aside whether or not this is an adequate description of appetite and its cognitive capacities, it is noteworthy that Socrates never attributes *judgments* of pleasantness or painfulness to Greek audience members. According to Socrates, in the theater the decent man suppresses his rational evaluation of human misfortune and lamentation in order that he may enjoy “praising and pitying” the tragic hero. Praising and pitying the tragic hero require the audience member to believe the axiological illusion that a hugely terrible thing befalls a noble man. However, why should this perception of goodness and badness issue from the appetitive part, which is primarily concerned with the satisfaction of bodily desires or the procurement of pleasant sensations?<sup>33</sup>

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32 Moss 2006 and Moss 2007.

33 It has been suggested that Socrates acknowledges appetitive desires for philosophy, music, politics, warfare, etc., on the grounds that the democrat pursues these objects as “equal” pleasures (561c-d). See, for example, Cooper 1984, 11-12. In contrast, Scott 2006 argues that the democrat's desires are not all appetitive in nature; rather, the democrat satisfies desires which issue from all three parts. Even supposing that the democrat's desire to pursue philosophy is appetitive in nature (which I suspect it is), it does not follow that Plato introduces appetites that are *not* desires for bodily satisfaction. Whereas the philosopher desires to practice philosophy so as to attain wisdom, the democrat likely desires to practice philosophy for the sake of the pleasant *sensations* it provides - e.g., the thrill of discovery, the feeling of giddiness in loudly expressing one's opinions, etc. So, in extending the class of appetitive desires beyond basic desires for food, drink, sex, etc., Socrates likely acknowledges that human beings go after a wide variety of things for the sake of superficial sensations.

Moss does not consider the more plausible alternative; namely, that spirit co-produces and believes the appearance that the hero is fine or noble. According to Socrates, the Greek poet, lacking knowledge of “what makes men better,” imitates “images of virtue” [εἶδολα ἀρετῆ], which Socrates analyzes as imitating that which *appears* “fine” [καλόν] to the ignorant majority (599c-d, 600e, 602b). However, it is the spirited part, not the appetitive part, which makes assessments of fineness or nobleness. According to Socrates, when a man believes someone has treated him unjustly, his spirit is enraged; fighting for “the seemingly just” [τῷ δοκοῦντι δικαίῳ] and not ceasing from “noble actions” [τῶν γενναίων], his spirit endures hunger and cold until it is victorious or else placated (440c-d). Spirit, as the source of moral indignation, is the natural ally of reason (440b-e). However, spirit's beliefs or judgments as regards the fine and the shameful are deficient insofar as they are insensitive to calculations of benefit and detriment (441b-c). In contrast to reason, spirit's judgments of fineness and shamefulness arise from whatever *appears* fine or shameful *to it*. It is for this reason that spirit is said to fight for whatever *seems* to be just. Also, this feature of spirit partly explains why music and poetry strongly influence spirit. According to Socrates, exposure to genuine images of virtue (in music and poetry) teaches nascent spirit to recognize truly “fine things” [καλά] and truly “shameful things” [αἰσχρά], so that it will harmonize with reason's assessments of fineness and shamefulness (401e-402a).<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, spirit's motivational orientation toward honor or social status explains its cognitive susceptibility to images of fineness or nobleness. In order to win society's esteem, an

34 Appetite is also implicated in this process. Music and poetry also teach the pre-rational soul to “enjoy” or “be pleased by” [χαίρειν] fine things (401e4). Notably, in Book X, popular Greek poetry is said to do the exact opposite – i.e., to cause theatergoers “to be pleased by” [χαίρειν] shameful behavior (i.e., lamentation) (605d-e). So, insofar as appetite experiences pleasures and pains, it is likely that music and poetry of the right sort train appetite, as well as spirit, to harmonize with reason.

individual must conform to society's image of the ideal human being. So, the spirited part is naturally very vulnerable to those images of fineness and shamefulness which enjoy a wider cultural currency. And insofar as Greek poets reflect whatever appears fine to the ignorant majority of Athenians (602a-b), they necessarily produce whatever appears fine to improperly educated spirit, whose perceptions of fineness and shamefulness are formed by a culture ignorant of virtue.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, to a large degree, Greek poetry contributes to (and reinforces) dominant social images of fineness, in that it represents Greek *heroes* – i.e., *highly esteemed* demigods and royalty – as irascible, excitable, multi-colored, etc. So, in Book III Socrates says that Greek poetry makes it appear (to adolescents) that shameful and impious behavior is acceptable, by depicting “children of the gods” (i.e., heroes) engaging in such behavior (391d, 388d). Since it is the nature of spirit to view as fine those whom society esteems, developing spirit naturally views the heroes of poetry as fine.

However, with regard to adults, it is not clear that poetry moulds spirit – i.e., shapes its basic conception of fineness and shamefulness. So, in Book X, tragedy is said to *strengthen* the irrational part, which is already improperly conditioned. In other words, Socrates conceives of tragic drama as strengthening an improperly educated part of the adult psyche, as opposed to forming an unformed part of the psyche (as is the case with youth). (In chapter 4 I will discuss in more detail what this “strengthening” of the irrational part amounts to.)

Perhaps appetite does have some role in co-producing tragedy's images of fineness. In producing images of “fine things” [καλά] the poet also produces images of beautiful things.

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<sup>35</sup> It may also be that spirit naturally admires hyper aggressiveness, since, as we shall see, it is primarily concerned with protecting the agent and her interests. So, unless educated to the contrary, spirit might naturally perceive irascible, excessively aggressive characters to be noble.

Indeed, the Greek term for “fine” - i.e., καλόν – encompasses both moral nobility and sensible beauty. Interestingly, the majority of Athenians perceive the multicolored character (whom the tragedian imitates) to be “beautiful” [καλόν]. Specifically, the democrat, who is multicolored and manifold, is generally regarded as “beautiful” [καλόν] (561e).<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the democratic, multicolored constitution is generally regarded as beautiful:

... It looks as though this [democratic constitution] is the finest or most beautiful [καλλίστη] of the constitutions, for, like a coat embroidered with every kind of ornament, this city, embroidered with every kind of character type, would seem [φαίνοιτο] to be the most beautiful [καλλίστη]. And many people would probably judge it to be so, as women and children do when they see something multicolored (557c3-7).

Why should the irrational part be prone to perceive variability as *beautiful*? Socrates provides no explicit answer. However, it is important that appetite – in its improperly trained state – is described as multicolored and variable, due to its manifold desires. So, perhaps improperly trained appetite is naturally attracted to variability, perceiving it as “beautiful” [καλόν]. In fact, in Book X Socrates implicates appetite in judgments of beauty. According to Socrates, ignorant people think that the poet speaks extremely well about cobblery, generalship, virtue, etc., so long as the poet “charms” them with meter, rhythm and harmony (601a). Socrates then compares the poet's work to the faces of young boys, which only appear beautiful [καλόν], due to their youthfulness (601b).<sup>37</sup> In other words, Socrates implies that young boys only appear beautiful to an onlooker, in virtue of his sexual, appetitive attraction to youth. So, for the analogy to work, the poet's work only appears beautiful to an audience member, in virtue of his appetitive attraction to certain pleasant auditory sensations associated with music, meter and rhythm. Thus,

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36 To be precise, Socrates says the democratic character *is* κάλον. However, he is clearly being ironical, since, a few lines later, he declares that the tyrant is the “κάλλιστος” man (562a).

37 So, with regard to ignorant audience members, who mistake apparent beauty for truth or accuracy, the tragedian produces the additional illusion that he speaks extremely well about virtue – i.e., accurately represents virtue.

it is entirely possible that improperly trained appetite co-produces tragedy's "images of beauty." (I will return shortly to the possibility and nature of appetitive perception and judgment.)

What about tragedy's images of terribleness or calamitousness? Is it appetite or spirit that co-produces these? It is doubtful that appetite makes judgements of terribleness, since appetite does not make judgments about what is good or bad for the agent in relation to her interests. Appetite desires pleasures and is adverse to pains (436a, 439d); and such desires and aversions may be constituted by the judgment that their object ought or ought not to be pursued. But it does not follow – nor does Socrates suggest - that appetite is capable of *valuing* X – by which I mean, judging X's worth relative to the agent's interests and being motivated to procure, protect and/or promote X. In contrast, spirit is said to be capable of valuing. Socrates describes the oligarch as follows:

Don't you think that this person would establish his appetitive and money-loving part on the throne, setting it up as a great king within himself, adorning it with golden tiaras and collars and girding it with Persian swords? He makes the rational and spirited parts sit on the ground beneath appetite, one on either side, reducing them to slaves. He won't allow the first to reason about or examine anything except how a little money can be made into a great wealth. And he won't allow the second to value [τιμᾶν] or admire [θαυμάζειν] anything but wealth and wealthy people or to have any ambition [φιλοτιμειῖσθαι] other than the acquisition of wealth or whatever might contribute to getting it (553c2-d6).

So, in an appetite-dominated individual, it is spirit, not appetite, which values or honors money. However, spirit's value judgments are deficient insofar as they are insensitive to rational considerations about what constitutes a worthwhile human life. As with its judgments of fineness and shamefulness, spirit's judgments of value arise from whatever appears to promote the agent's interests in the moment, rather than from rational calculations about longterm benefit or detriment. Also, what appears to spirit to promote the agent's interests is largely determined by cultural or social conditioning, rather than by rational calculations of value. In other words, just as spirit is susceptible to society's images of ideal and non-ideal human beings, it is also



susceptible to society's images of ideal and non-ideal human lives (the two being intimately related). Conformity to both ideals wins what spirit wants; namely, society's esteem. In ancient Athens, wealth, power, embodied existence and loved ones figured heavily into society's image of the ideal human life. Hence, the “improperly educated” spirited part of Athenians, including decent Athenians, would have viewed wealth, embodied existence, loved ones, etc. as very valuable and the loss thereof as terrible.

In sum, the spirited part of decent theatergoers values, and its values normally reflect those of the dominant culture. This is important for our purposes, since the judgment that the hero's misfortune is terrible is a value judgment, which reflects society's values. To suppose that audience members perceive the hero's misfortune as merely “painful” is to misconstrue Socrates' audience psychology. According to Socrates, we “follow” the hero to the extent that we lament with the hero and “take his sufferings seriously” (605d2), which requires that we accept the hero's assessment that he “fares badly” [κακῶς πεπραγέναι] with regard to his loss of possessions, loved ones, etc.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the best evidence for my claim that tragedy and spirit co-create the illusion that the hero's misfortune is terrible comes from Socrates' account of courage and cowardice. According to Socrates, a man is courageous when his spirit follows reason's pronouncements of what is and is not fearful or terrible [δεινόν]; and a man is cowardly when, in virtue of his improperly trained spirit, he judges death to be fearful or terrible (442b-c).<sup>39</sup> Importantly, Socrates' examples of

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38 At 603c Socrates claims that imitative poetry imitates human beings in action, who believe that they fare well or badly in these actions and who experience either pleasure or pain as a result. From this it can be inferred that the tragic hero, whom the imitative poet imitates, believes that he fares badly with regard to his misfortune.

39 According to Socrates, stories that portray death as fearful and terrible should be banned, because they make children and men fear death more than slavery (387b). So, for Socrates, courage is not a disposition to *not fear at all*; rather, it is disposition to fear *the right sorts of things* and, in so doing, to make the right judgments about

heroes lamenting (all taken from the *Iliad*) each involve heroes bewailing the death of a loved one (388a-b). Socrates criticizes such depictions, on the grounds that they allegedly convince the guardians that death is terrible [δεινόν], thereby making them cowardly (387d-e). Thus, the illusion that Socrates most associates with tragedy – i.e., the illusion that death is lamentation-worthy (and hence terrible) – is likely to be believed by improperly educated spirit, which manifests the vice of cowardice.

To be sure, Socrates acknowledges that tragic heroes lament other things – e.g., the loss of money or prized possessions (387e, 603e). This might seem to suggest that appetite, qua the “money-loving” part of the soul, is susceptible to tragedy’s illusion that the loss of money is terrible. However, as we have seen, it is the spirited part of the money-lover’s soul that values money. Thus, appetite-enslaved spirit is likely susceptible to the axiological illusion that the loss of money is terrible.<sup>40</sup>

### III. The Nature of Spirit

If I am right and tragedy’s axiological illusions appeal primarily to improperly trained spirit, then this has implications for how we should understand spirit – a part of the soul that has historically puzzled scholars.<sup>41</sup> Some commentators speculate that the spirited part of the soul is, at its roots, primarily concerned with preserving the agent’s self-image or self-esteem. Roughly, the idea is that spirit loves honor insofar as honor promotes the agent’s self-image or self-esteem and that it becomes angry or ashamed in response to perceived threats to the agent’s self-image or

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what is fearful and what is not. Hence, cowardice consists in fearing the wrong sorts of things (e.g., death) and making the wrong judgments about what is fearful.

40 Remarkably, Socrates does not criticize tragic heroes for bewailing the loss of social status, which is quite common in tragedy.

41 See, for example, Penner 1971, 111-113; Nussbaum 1986, 272; and Annas 1981, 126-128.

self-esteem.<sup>42</sup> While I do not think this view is completely off-base, I do not think it is completely right either, mainly because Socrates' examples of spirit do not necessarily reflect a concern with self-image or self-esteem. Odysseus' anger at his maids for cavorting with Penelope's suitors, Leontius' anger at himself for gawking at corpses, the barking dog and the screaming baby all plausibly react to perceived threats to their social standing, rather than perceived threats to their self-image or self-esteem.<sup>43</sup> In short, spirit is more motivated to preserve the agent's *outward* image (i.e., the image the agent puts “out there,” for others to see) than to preserve the agent's *inward* image or self-image.

That said, a concern for outward image can easily transmute into a concern for inward image; however, the concern with outward image comes first. Hence, spirit is not only characterized by its love of honor, but also by its love of conquering [νικᾶν] and controlling [κρατεῖν] (581a9-10). The desire for dominance and the desire for esteem are alike in that both are desires for a high place in the social order.

Quite plausibly, spirit is even more basic. Spirit is concerned with what is terrible and what is wonderful for the agent, because spirit functions to protect the agent and her interests. (In contrast, appetite functions to service the body.) Hence, the political correlate of spirit, the guardian class, functions to protect the polis and its interests. So, spirit's concern with social status and dominance could be seen as the shape that a drive to preserve oneself and one's interests takes *in societies*, wherein preserving oneself and one's interests depends largely on one's social status. However, whereas properly educated spirit includes and prioritizes *the city's* wellbeing in its reckoning of the agent's interests, improperly educated spirit does not. This is why fear of death and cowardice are vices of improperly trained spirit. Improperly trained spirit

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42 See Hobbs 2000, esp. 1-37 and Cooper 1984 respectively.

43 See 439e-441b.

judges the demise of the agent to be more terrible and fearful than the demise of the city.<sup>44</sup>

Granted, Socrates characterizes spirit as the “honor-loving” part of the soul, which might seem to suggest that spirit is essentially a drive for social standing. However, Socrates calls appetite the “money-loving part,” even though appetite's desire for money arises from its more basic desire to service the body. So, the characterization of spirit as the honor-loving part is no objection to my hypothesis that spirit is, at its roots, concerned with the protection of the agent and her interests.

Of course, this is not to say that spirit's desires for social status and dominance are always manifestations of the desire to protect oneself and one's interests. Indeed, just as appetite can come to desire money *for itself* and not simply as a means to satisfying more basic bodily desires (as in the case of the oligarch), spirit can come to desire power and honor *for itself* rather than simply as a means to protecting oneself and one's interests (as in the case of the timocrat). Both the appetite-ruled oligarch and the spirit-ruled timocrat respectively desire money and honor *for themselves*, because they neglect to cultivate the arational parts of their souls; the result is that formerly healthy desires grow unhealthy.

#### IV. Appetite and its Role in Plato's Audience Psychology

Although appetite does not co-produce and believe tragedy's dominant axiological illusion (i.e., that a fine man suffers a terrible misfortune), it nevertheless plays a key role in Plato's audience psychology. In particular, improperly trained appetite hungers to physically express spirit's assessment of the hero's misfortune. Certainly, grief per se is not pleasurable; however, its

<sup>44</sup> Socrates likely thinks that spirit naturally prioritizes the interests of the agent and his kin over the interests of the city, for which reason the philosopher-kings must convince the populace (especially the guardians) that they are all kinsmen, either via the Myth of Metals or by abolishing the institution of the family, thereby convincing the citizens that they are all possible kinsmen. So, although the fear of death is natural to spirit, it can – through proper education – be replaced by a fear for the demise of the city.

outward expression is.<sup>45</sup> So, in arousing and gratifying the audience member's appetitive desire to lament the hero's misfortune, tragedy further conditions audience members to be pleased by lamentation, with the result that they are more likely to lament *their own misfortunes* (606b). Having been conditioned in this manner, the decent man can no longer resist the pleasure of succumbing to his appetitive desire to give his spirited assessment of his own misfortunes outward, physical expression. Such surrender requires the decent man to believe, rather than resist, his spirited assessment of his own misfortune. In the *Republic* Socrates emphasizes the power of pleasure to alter one's established beliefs. In particular, Socrates claims that individuals lose their correct beliefs about how they should behave under the spell of fear or pleasure (413b-c). Notably, Socrates describes the Greek poet as “charming” and “pleasing” his audience (601a, 606d, 607a, 607c-d). Under the “spell” (i.e., the conditioning effects) of pleasure the decent theatergoer relinquishes his rational assessment of personal misfortune, accepting instead his spirited assessment of personal misfortune.<sup>46</sup>

Lastly, the appetitive desire to lament may or may not be constituted by the belief that its object is, in some sense, good. I suspect that it is. In the *Republic* appetite possesses perception, as evidenced by the aforementioned fact that appetite is educable or persuadable by images. Also, given that the *Republic* individuates cognitive faculties by the objects they are set over, it follows that perception is a form of belief, since belief, like perception, is set over sensibles (477b-479e). Thus, appetite's perception qualifies as belief. A passage in Book IV reveals the nature of appetitive perception or belief:

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45 Hence, in the *Philebus* Socrates classes lamentation as a “mixed pleasure,” involving an element of pleasure and an element of pain (47e-48a).

46 As we have seen, tragedy also produces appearances of the fearful and so might condition audiences through fear as well. However, unlike Aristotle, Plato does not say that tragedy produces fear in audiences.

Wouldn't you say that the soul of someone who has an appetite [τοῦ ἐπιθυμοῦντος] for a thing wants what he has an appetite for and takes to himself what it is his will to have, and that insofar as he wishes something to be given to him, his soul, since it desires this to come about, nods assent to it as if in answer to a question (437c2-6).

In having an appetite for X, the soul “nods assent” to X. It perceives X as something that “ought to be pursued;” it judges X to be choice-worthy. Here, appetitive desires involve a perception or judgment of choice-worthiness.

In the case of appetite, this appearance of choice-worthiness likely arises from facts about the agent's biological makeup and/or past experiences. So, for example, carrot cake appears choice-worthy to appetite, because the agent is hungry and/or because the agent has historically taken pleasure in carrot cake (or similar foods). Likewise, lamentation appears choice-worthy to appetite, because the agent is overwhelmed by pain and/or because the agent has historically experienced pleasure in lamentation. Thus, the appetitive desire to lament is likely rooted in both the agent's biological makeup and her past experiences. And indeed, according to Socrates, children characteristically weep and wail when they trip (604c), which suggests that the desire to weep and wail in response to pain is hardwired. What is more, the irrational part is said to hunger for lamentation “by nature” (606a5). Nevertheless, as we have seen, properly cultivated appetite can be pruned of its harmful, unnecessary desires, including its biologically preprogrammed hunger for lamentation. However, far from diminishing this childish inclination to outwardly express pain (as a proper education in music and poetry would), tragic poetry actually arouses and gratifies it. In other words, tragic poetry fosters audience members' appetitive desire to lament by enlisting them to experience pleasure in connection with lamentation. What is more, insofar as appetite's perception of the choice-worthiness of lamentation arises partly from its experiencing pleasure in lamentation in the past, tragic drama actually fosters appetite's perception of the choice-worthiness of lamentation. Thus, in a certain sense, tragedy and

improperly trained appetite co-create the axiological illusion that lamentation is a choice-worthy response to mental anguish, just as tragedy and improperly trained spirit co-create the axiological illusion that a fine man suffers a terrible fate. Also, as aforementioned, it is possible that tragedy and improperly trained appetite co-create the illusion that the “multi-colored” hero is beautiful or attractive (in virtue of his variability).

## V. Conclusion

This completes my argument that Greek tragedy co-produces axiological illusions in concert with improperly educated spirit and appetite. For Socrates, popular Greek drama interacts with an arational part of the agent's psyche (i.e., spirit and appetite) that uncritically accepts socially sanctioned appearances of virtue and value and biologically based (or experience based) appearances of choice-worthiness and possibly attractiveness. Importantly, according to Socrates, the culture of ancient Athens exposed spirit and appetite to the wrong ideals of virtue and value and to manifold unhealthy pleasures, with the result that Athenians were prone to perceive the wrong things as virtuous, valuable and attractive, even when their reason suggested otherwise (as in the case of the decent man).<sup>47</sup> This propensity to perceive the wrong things as virtuous, valuable and attractive explains why improperly trained appetite and spirit actually co-produce (as opposed to merely accept) tragedy's axiological illusions. In short, tragedy is one of many cultural or societal forces which, over time, conspire to corrupt the soul. Tragedy *alone*

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<sup>47</sup> As I have suggested, spirit may be naturally constituted to view certain sorts of things as virtuous and/or valuable in virtue of its overarching desire to protect the agent and her interests. Similarly, appetite is surely naturally constituted to take pleasure in certain sorts of things. Moreover, it is possible that, to a certain extent, Athenian culture exacerbates some of the unhealthy, natural dispositions of spirit and/or appetite (e.g., the spirited admiration of excessively aggressive characters, the spirited fear of death and/or the appetite desire for lamentation). A healthier culture would work to reconstitute or redirect spirited and appetitive desires so as to harmonize them with reason.

does not corrupt adults.

It remains to explain why tragedy's axiological illusions are *illusions*; in particular, why irascible, complex characters are not noble, why death and the loss of loved ones are not terrible, and why lamentation is not choice-worthy. Also, certain aspects of Plato's audience psychology require further explication; for example, the sense in which the irrational part can be said to believe, the way in which tragedy strengthens the irrational part, the role of sympathy in audience response, etc. I take up these and other questions in chapter four, where I assess the plausibility of Plato's model of audience psychology.

In the next chapter I argue that the *Republic* does not contain a metaphysical attack on poetry or images – an argument that relies in part on one of the crucial claims of this chapter; namely, that tragedy co-produces axiological *illusions* in concert with the irrational part of the soul.



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## CHAPTER 2

### **Poetry and Metaphysics in *Republic X***

Republic X commentators regularly distinguish between Socrates' metaphysical devaluation of poetry and his ethical or psychological devaluation of poetry; poetry is metaphysically inferior (because it copies images) and ethically inferior (because it corrupts the soul).<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the assumption that Book X attacks poetry on metaphysical grounds is ubiquitous in scholarly, classroom and nonacademic discussions of Plato's aesthetics.<sup>49</sup> In this chapter I challenge this assumption. I contend that *Republic X* critiques the “art of mimesis” or “imitativeness” [μίμητική] on purely ethical or psychological grounds.

#### I. The Supposed Metaphysical Charge Against Poetry

At the outset of Book X Socrates remarks that they were right to ban “imitative” [μίμητική] poetry in light of the tripartite theory of the soul; such poetry corrupts the soul (595a-b).<sup>50</sup> Socrates next proposes to define “mimesis as a whole”<sup>51</sup> [μίμησιν ὅλως], in order to uncover the sense in which poetry can be said to be imitative (595c). This move is important, as it indicates that in Book III Socrates does not define “mimesis as a whole,” but rather a “part” or

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48 See, for example, Murray 1997 and Halliwell 1988.

49 The supposed “metaphysical charge” is that poetry is an image of an image of the Forms and so is “far removed” from truth. Plato's supposed metaphysical charge against poetry is not only a common fixture in philosophy classes and even philosophy podcasts (e.g., “Poetry as a Way of Knowing,” *Philosophy Talk*, 04/06/2012); it also dominates a lot of the scholarship on *Republic X*. See, for example, Annas 1982; Moss 2007; and Gould 1996.

50 Notably, Socrates does not here appeal to the theory of the Forms.

51 Throughout I use the Grube and Reeve 1992 translation of the *Republic*, unless otherwise noted.

“species” of mimesis. So, in Book III Socrates claims that “to make oneself like someone else in voice or appearance is to imitate [μιμεῖσθαι] the person one makes oneself like” (393c4-5). Two things are important here. Socrates is not *defining* “mimesis as a whole” as impersonation. In fact, shortly thereafter, Socrates says that music constitutes mimesis, even though music does not imitate characters by impersonating them (399a-c). Second (and this is crucial) Socrates does not ban the practice of impersonating characters. In fact, permitted poetry will include the impersonation of “decent men” (397d). As Belfiore points out, what Socrates bans in Book III is “imitating many things and being an imitator [μιμητικός]” (395a), where “being an imitator” is equivalent to being a practitioner of the *art* of imitation (hence the “-τικ” root, which denotes an art).<sup>52</sup> This receives confirmation in Book X, wherein Socrates declares that they were right to ban *imitative* [μιμητική] poetry. Again, the “-τικ” root indicates that Socrates targets an art of imitation, rather than mimesis as such. This is supported by the fact that even though *all* poetry employs mimesis of characters (in the form of impersonation and/or musical accompaniments), Socrates does not ban all poetry.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, poetry of the right sort forms the foundation of the guardians' early education.

Why does Socrates set out to define “mimesis as a whole” in Book X, if he is primarily concerned with an art of imitation? I shall address this issue in due course. Following Belfiore, I claim that Socrates makes a distinction between mimesis and the art of imitation – a distinction that is more explicitly drawn in the *Sophist*. However, I disagree with Belfiore's definition of the art of imitation. Her account is somewhat inadequate, insofar as it (a) fails to adequately unite the account of μιμητική in Book III with that in Book X and (b) is unable to explain why employing some mimesis and impersonation of bad characters does not necessarily qualify a poem as

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52 See Belfiore 1984.

53 See 398b and 607a, where Socrates specifies what sort of poetry is allowed.

“imitative” in the pejorative sense – i.e., as being a product of the art of imitation. The question of what the art of imitation is and why it is bad is essential to the question of whether or not Socrates devalues certain sorts of poetry (in particular, drama) on metaphysical or ontological grounds. For this reason, we must look carefully at Socrates' account of mimesis in Book X, with a view to discovering what defines the art of imitation and its product, imitative poetry.

Socrates defines the practitioner of the art of imitation – the μιμητικός - as one who, like a man with a mirror, copies the “appearance” or “look” [εἶδολα, φαντάσματα, φαινόμενα] of sensible particulars, which are dimly *like* [τοιούτους] the Forms (595c-597e). Hence, the work of the imitator is “two removes from truth,” because it is an appearance of a likeness of “the real” [τὸ ὄν] (i.e., the Forms). Imitation is a sort of unserious “play” [παιδιάν], requiring neither knowledge nor right opinion of the object of imitation (602a-b). Nevertheless, the imitator deceives children and foolish people into thinking that he is knowledgeable about what he purports to imitate (598c-d). So, the painter is an imitator, because – being ignorant of the crafts - he copies the appearance of craftsmen and their products. Also, the painter is deceptive. Children and foolish people think that a painting of a couch or a carpenter “is truly” [ἀληθῶς εἶναι] (i.e., correctly represents) a couch or a carpenter and that the painter possesses knowledge of carpentry.<sup>54</sup>

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54 There is a long history of debate over what Socrates means by “is truly” [ἀληθῶς εἶναι] a carpenter. The Greek is consistent with either an ontological or veridical interpretation of “ἀληθῶς εἶναι.” So, Socrates could be appealing to highly realistic painting so as to make the rather implausible point that foolish people mistake the painting of a carpenter for a real life carpenter. See Halliwell 1988, 119-120 and Janaway 1995, 134 for this “ontological interpretation.” Alternatively, Socrates could be making the not so implausible point that foolish people mistake the painting of a carpenter for a correct representation of a carpenter. See Belfiore 1983, 40-50 and Moss 2007, 422-423 for this “veridical interpretation.” The veridical interpretation receives support from the fact that Socrates concludes, on the basis of this example, that foolish people are deceived into believing that the

It is not immediately obvious how this characterization of painting – as a copy of the appearance of sensible particulars – carries over to poetry. What is the poet's correlate of the painter's couch? According to Annas, the analogy with painting is deeply flawed; nothing corresponds to the painter's couch.<sup>55</sup> The poet is not an imitator, because the poet does not - in the manner of the painter - mechanically copy the appearance of material particulars (e.g., beds, craftsmen, etc.). Nevertheless, most scholars counter that the analogy with painting is just that - an *analogy*<sup>56</sup> - and that painting and poetry are imitative in different respects. The imitative poet is an imitator, because he imitates one of two things:

- (1) The “look” or “feel” of human affairs and behavior more generally<sup>57</sup>
- (2) The appearance of virtue and value<sup>58</sup>

Two points warrant mentioning. First, (1) and (2) are not mutually exclusive. In imitating the appearance of human beings engaged in action, the poet also plausibly imitates appearances of

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painter is “all knowing,” in the sense of knowing about all the crafts (598c-d). Moreover, Socrates very clearly has veridical truth in mind with regard to the imitative poet, who is said to produce whatever appears fine to the ignorant majority (602b1). Thus, the ontological reading creates a discontinuity between imitative painting and imitative poetry. Lastly, it is doubtful that Socrates has highly realistic painting in mind. In her book on Greek painting Keuls 1978, 59-87 has argued that Book X targets a form of painting (*skiagraphia*) that does not involve extreme realism of the sort employed by Greek painters like Zeuxis, whose painting of grapes was reportedly so realistic that actual birds pecked at it.

55 Annas 1982, 4-6. Cf. Else 1986, 44-46.

56 So, at 603b Socrates says that “... we mustn't rely solely on a mere probability based on the analogy with painting ... .”

57 See, for example, Ferrari 1989, 129. Notably, when Socrates claims that the imitative poet imitates human beings in action, he gives no indication that these are actual, particular instances of human beings and their actions (603c).

58 Belfiore 1983 and Moss 2007.

virtue and value, since actions and persons generally appear good or bad. Second, neither case involves copying the appearance of sensible particulars. Thus, on such accounts (favored by the majority of scholars), imitative painting and imitative poetry are importantly disanalogous; whereas imitative painting copies the appearance of material particulars, imitative poetry copies the appearance of human action more generally and/or appearances of virtue and value.

However, it is not obvious that imitative poetry is disanalogous to imitative painting in this respect. Book X's exemplars of imitative poetry – i.e., epic and tragic poetry - copy the appearance of particular ancient events and persons – i.e., ancient events and persons *as imagined* by the poet or by the wider culture. (In fact, in the *Ion* Socrates implies that the Muse grants the poet cognitive access to particular ancient events (533d-536d).) Moreover, in Books II-III poems about the ancient past are said to be poems about virtue and value; it is by portraying highly esteemed personages (i.e., ancient heroes) and their actions that poems produce images of virtue and value – i.e., images of how one *should* act and what one *should* pursue. Undoubtedly, Homer's image of Achilles is not related to an actual person in the same way that a painting of a couch is related to the actual, material couch of which it is an imitation. This is because the appearance of Achilles does not supervene on any actual human being in the way that the appearance of the couch supervenes on the material couch. Nevertheless, both the painter and Homer conceivably copy appearances of particulars, regardless of whether those particulars are material actualities or imagined possibilities.

While in Books II-III Socrates suspects that Greek poets radically misrepresent the ancient past (and hence have no – or at least flawed<sup>59</sup> – cognitive access to the past), he does not

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59 Determining the nature of the poet's cognitive access to ancient events is not immediately relevant to Plato's task, which is to show how poetry corrupts the soul. However, even if the poets are inspired and are granted cognitive access to ancient events by the Muses, the poets, lacking knowledge of human value and virtue, will nevertheless

linger on this point. According to Socrates, even if Greek poets are correct about the ancient past (e.g., Zeus really did castrate his father), their poetry must be banned, because it produces a potentially corruptive appearance of how one ought to live (377e-378c). So, given Socrates' focus (in Books II-III and Book X) on the corruptive effects of poetry, it is no surprise that Socrates sets aside the difficult epistemological question (addressed in the *Ion*) of whether and how the poet has cognitive access to ancient events. Since the task of Book X is to demonstrate how imitative poetry corrupts the soul, Socrates focuses on poetry's "normatively charged" images of virtue and value, rather than poetry's images of past particulars. The former – and not the latter – are immediately relevant to showing how poetry corrupts the soul. This emphasis on poetry's images of virtue and value persists throughout Book X. So, Homer is said to be an imitator, because, ignorant of "what ways of life make people better in private or in public" (599d-600d), he imitates "images of excellence" [εἰδώλων ἀρετῆς] (600e5), which amounts to copying whatever "appears fine [φαίνεται καλόν] to the majority who know nothing" (602b1). Imitative poetry also imitates appearances of value, as evidenced by the fact that it appeals to a part of the soul that believes appearances and opposes rational calculations of value (604b-605a).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, in the manner of an imitator, Homer is deceptive with regard to his images of virtue and value. Foolish people erroneously suppose that Homer is "the poet who educated Greece, that it's worth taking up his works in order to learn how to manage and educate people, and that one should arrange one's whole life in accordance with his teachings" (606e2-4).

Again, the disanalogy with painting is merely apparent, for painting is also said to produce images of fineness. In fact, according to Socrates, imitators in general copy "appearances of fineness" (602a-b). Notably, this further feature of the imitator - one on which

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misinterpret and misrepresent ancient events. See Collobert 2011.

<sup>60</sup> This point is more fully developed in chapter 1.



the ethical charge against imitative poetry is based – is established without reference to the Forms. In other words, the imitator is not an imitator because, lacking cognitive access to the “Form of the the Good,” he copies images of fineness. Rather, the imitator of X is an imitator because, in failing to obtain correct opinion about X from the expert user of X, he imitates whatever erroneously appears to be a fine X to the non-expert (601c-602a). For example, whereas the flute-maker consults the user of flutes (i.e., the professional flautist) in order to gain right opinion about good and bad flutes; the imitator reduplicates whatever appears to be a fine flute to the non-flautist (601d-e). In other words, lack of correct opinion about *sensibles* (rather than Forms) qualifies the imitator as an imitator; no appeal to Platonic metaphysics is required.

Although Socrates focuses on the imitator's imitations of goodness and badness (since this is immediately relevant to how imitative poetry corrupts the soul), Socrates nevertheless does disparage the art of imitation, which involves copying appearances, including the visual appearances of physical objects. Hence, well before Socrates accuses imitative poetry of corrupting the soul, Socrates denigrates the μιμητικός (including the painter) for producing images that are “far removed from truth” (598b). The clear implication throughout is that the painter's visual appearances of objects are “removed from truth” in the same way as the poet's axiological appearances of virtue and value. The question naturally (and rightly) becomes why such appearances, including appearances of virtue and value, are “far removed” from truth. To the extent that most scholars answer this question by appeal to Plato's metaphysics, they ultimately ground Plato's ethical or psychological charge against Greek poetry in Plato's metaphysics; in particular, his account of the relationship between Forms, sensibles and images in Book VI. Others (like Annas) suppose that imitative poetry is “trivial” (because it copies appearances of sensible particulars) and so cannot possibly corrupt the soul, despite what Socrates says. So, in Annas' view, there is no basis to Socrates' claim that imitative poetry

corrupts the soul “by making images that are far removed from truth” (605b6-7). However, Annas overlooks the fact that imitative poetry copies appearances of *goodness or badness*, which undoubtedly have the potential to corrupt the soul (as opposed to appearances of beds and carpenters).

Put simply, whether or not Book X devalues mimesis in general or the art of imitation specifically will depend on what Socrates means by “images” and “appearances” in Book X. What sort of ontological item are appearances, and what bearing does this have on their degree of truth and their potentially corruptive influence? In determining what Socrates means by “appearances” and “mimesis” in Book X, it will be important to keep three parameters in mind. In particular, Socrates' notions of 'image' and 'appearance' must account first for why they are more removed from truth than sensible particulars and second for how their axiological instances corrupt the soul. Third, Socrates' corresponding notion of 'mimesis' (and possible divisions therein) must make manifest why Socrates bans only a certain sort of poetry (i.e., “imitative poetry”), as opposed to all poetry.

Nehamas, seeking to rehabilitate Plato's supposed metaphysical devaluation of popular poetry, maintains that mimesis is the practice of *duplicating* reality; so, the sorrowing on stage is ontologically identical to the sorrowing in real life.<sup>61</sup> According to Nehamas, Plato targets popular art, which, unlike the fine arts, precludes aesthetic distance between the spectator and the work of art, with the result that the spectator relates to popular art in the same way that she relates to real life. In contrast to popular art - the contents of which audiences “project directly” onto the real world - the fine arts “bear an indirect, interpretive relationship to the world, and further interpretation on the part of audience and critics is necessary in order to understand it.”<sup>62</sup>

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61 Nehamas 1988 (1999 reprint), 289-91.

62 Nehamas 1988 (1999 reprint), 291.

As a general interpretation of popular art Nehamas' view is interesting; however, as an interpretation of Plato, Nehamas' view cannot be right. This is because Socrates makes a point of establishing that the images of mimesis are ontologically *dissimilar* to the reality that they purport to imitate; whereas the imitator's images are two removed from truth, what they purport to imitate is one remove from truth. Hence, as we have seen, it is more correct to say that the imitative poet produces the *look* or *appearance* of sensible phenomena than to say that the imitative poet *duplicates* sensible phenomena.

Nevertheless, there are two promising views that both explain the distinct, ontological status of the images of mimesis (as something “two removes” from truth) and that come very close to meeting the other two parameters – i.e., that mimetic images of goodness and badness corrupt the soul and that mimetic poetry constitutes a distinct class of poetry, which, unlike non-mimetic poetry, ought to be banished from the kallipolis.

The first view receives compelling textual support, so long as we confine ourselves to a single passage of Book X, wherein Socrates defines the imitator:

Now, tell me this about the painter. Do you think he tries in each case to imitate the thing itself in nature [i.e., the Forms] or the works of craftsmen?

The works of craftsmen.

As they are or as they appear [οἷα ἔστιν ἢ οἷα φαίνεται]? For you must yet distinguish this [τοῦτο γὰρ ἔτι διόρισον].<sup>63</sup>

How do you mean?

Like this. If you look at a couch from the side or the front or from anywhere else is it a different couch each time? Or does it only appear different, without being at all different?

And is that also the case with other things?

That's the way it is – it appears different without being so.

Then consider this very point: What does painting do in each case? Does it imitate that which is as it is [τὸ ὄν, ὡς ἔχει], or does it imitate that which appears as it appears [τὸ φαινόμενον, ὡς φαίνεται]? Is it an imitation of appearances [φαντάσματος] or of truth [ἀληθείας]?

Of appearances.

Then imitation [μιμητική] is far removed from truth [τοῦ ἀληθοῦς], for it touches only a

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63 Here I diverge from Grube/Reeve 1992, which translates “τοῦτο γὰρ ἔτι διόρισον” as “you must be clear about that.”

small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image [εἶδωλον]. And that, it seems, is why it can produce everything (597e8-598b6).

On the basis of this passage, Marusic has recently argued that, for Plato, imitation is “two removes from truth,” because it is “partial” or “deficient.”<sup>64</sup> It does not present *the whole truth* about what it imitates. It can only give us a single perspective –i.e., a “partial view” – of what it imitates. The painting only presents one angle of the couch; similarly, the poem only presents one angle on virtue or value. Audiences do not get “the whole picture;” and insofar as they suppose that poems supply them with a complete picture, they are deceived. Marusic's interpretation not only shows why imitative poetry is less true than the reality that it imitates; it can also show why imitative poetry corrupts the soul. Insofar as foolish people suppose that images of virtue and value represent the *whole truth* about virtue and value, they develop a superficial conception of how they ought to live their lives.

However, there is a major problem with Marusic's account of the imitator as copying something partial or incomplete. In particular, it cannot accommodate the fact that Socrates subsequently argues that Homer is an imitator by showing that he lacks both knowledge and correct opinion about what he purports to imitate (namely, human virtue). This move is unintelligible, if Marusic is right, and Socrates here *defines* the imitator as a copier of something partial. If Marusic were right, the logic would be different; having defined imitators as copiers of something partial, Socrates would have subsequently pointed out that *all* poetry reproduces a partial view of virtue and value and is therefore imitative (epistemological arguments aside). However, Socrates does not proceed in this manner. Rather, Socrates classifies *some* poetry as imitative, on the grounds that it is produced without knowledge and without true opinion of what it purports to imitate. This strongly suggests that Socrates is highlighting the *incorrectness*

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64 Marusic 2011.

(rather than the partiality) of mimetic images; mimetic images *misrepresent* what they purport to imitate.<sup>65</sup> And indeed, in Books I-III Socrates is not concerned about Greek poetry presenting a “partial” view of virtue so much as radically (and consistently) *misrepresenting* virtue – i.e., presenting vice as the paradigm of virtue. Notably, in Book II Socrates declares that Homer, Hesiod and other poets tells stories that “give a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, the way a painter does whose picture is not at all like the thing he's trying to paint” (377d9-e2).

Naturally, this raises the difficult question of why Socrates supposes that the various visual perspectives of the couch actually *misrepresent* the couch (as opposed to merely providing a “partial view” of the couch). Moss, whose relatively recent work on *Republic X* has been quite influential, believes that the answer lies in Plato's theory of Forms and sensibles. According to Moss, Socrates' point is that the perspectival appearances of the couch are “varied, changing and contradictory;” in contrast, the Form of the couch is “stable, uniform and consistent.” Moss claims that sensible particulars are related to Forms *in just this way*; whereas sensible particulars are varied, changing and contradictory, Forms are stable, uniform and consistent. (Unfortunately, Moss never specifies the univocal sense in which both perspectival appearances and sensible particulars can be said to be “contradictory.”) Next, Moss appeals to the Divided Line, according to which sensible particulars are to Forms what sensible particulars are to images, with respect to truth (510a). From this, Moss infers that images are removed from truth *in the same way* that sensible particulars are removed from truth – i.e., by being varied and contradictory with regard to the relatively uniform and consistent reality that they are related to. Moss maintains, further, that Socrates applies this metaphysical or ontological distinction to matters of value; the appearance of a good character (which the imitative poet copies) is related to a sensible instance

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65 Further support for this interpretation will be provided when we look at the connection between mimetic images and illusion.

of a good character in the same way that a given sensible instance of a good character is related to the Form of the Good. The appearance of a good character is “varied and contradictory” with respect to the sensible instance of a good character, which is itself varied and contradictory with regard to the absolutely uniform and consistent Form of the Good. In support of this claim, Moss points out that in imitating the *appearance* of a good character imitative poets imitate a “varied and contradictory” character (i.e., the multicolored [ποικίλον] character).

Unfortunately, this final piece of Moss' reasoning is fallacious. Simply because the imitative poet copies an image of a varied and contradictory character does not entail that the image *itself* is varied and contradictory (like the perspectival appearances of the couch). Moss conflates the content of an image with its nonrepresentational nature. (This is like supposing that an image of vice is itself vicious.) Moreover, although Socrates offers a penetrating critique of the multicolored man (i.e., the democrat) in Book VIII, he devalues the democrat on *ethical*, not metaphysical, grounds. The democratic life is chaotic and lacks a principle of organization. “Varied” characters lack integrity, in that they go for whatever happens to strike their fancy, as opposed to acting from a rational, unified vision of what is worthwhile in life (561c-e). In other words, Socrates makes no appeal to metaphysics to establish that the multicolored man is vicious, nor is such an appeal required.

Indeed, in many respects Moss' view is confounding. For instance, (1) the meaning of “contradictory” is left ambiguous in this context (self-contradictory or contradictory to other instances of F?); (2) it isn't clear why and in what sense sensibles and appearances (and the multicolored man) are “contradictory;” (3) she fallaciously conflates the content of an image with its nonrepresentational nature (and hence its ontological status); and (4) it is not obvious how something can be “relatively” uniform and consistent.

That said, perhaps Moss has something right. Taking Moss' reasoning in a slightly

different direction, we might say that the images or appearances of mimetic poetry – like the perspectival appearances of a couch – are *themselves* varied and contradictory; which is to say, appearances of F vary and are inconsistent with *other* appearances of F. Just as one perspective of a couch varies and is inconsistent with another perspective, one perspective on virtue varies and is inconsistent with another perspective. Indeed, Gould expresses such a view.<sup>66</sup> He argues that imitative poetry (and, in particular, tragedy) insists on the “multivalency of experience.” In other words, imitative poetry presents competing and “conflicting” realities, when, in fact, true reality (i.e., intelligible reality) is uniform. Importantly, for Gould (as well as for Moss) mimetic poetry and images more generally constitute a *distortion* of reality – a distortion that is analogous to the way in which sensible reality distorts intelligible reality.<sup>67</sup>

The first problem with this view is that Socrates never says that the poets present competing perspectives on virtue; rather, in Books II-III, Socrates faults Greek poets for presenting a single, consistently *wrong* perspective on virtue and value. That Socrates conceives of imitative poetry as presenting a single, consistent (with itself) perspective on virtue and value is also suggested by the fact that its correlate, imitative painting, presents a single, consistent (with itself) perspective of the couch (as opposed to conflicting perspectives).

However, the deeper problem with both of these approaches is that they share a set of mistaken assumptions. The primary mistaken assumption is that sensibles are “removed from” Forms in the same way that *imitative* images are removed from sensibles. Whereas a sensible instance of justice, courage, temperance, etc. is *like* the Form of Justice, Courage, Temperance,

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66 Gould 1996.

67 The “distortion view” is not an uncommon interpretation of the relationship between sensibles and Forms. See Harte 2008, 207. As we shall see, the distortion view is an inadequate description of the metaphysical relationship between Forms and sensibles and sensibles and images in the *Republic*.

etc. (respectively); a mimetic appearance of virtue constitutes a radical distortion or misrepresentation of virtue (i.e., an “illusion” of virtue). This is precisely why mimetic appearances of virtue corrupt the soul, whereas sensible instances of virtue do not. (I am purposely distinguishing “images” from “mimetic images” or “appearances,” because, as will become clear, a correct image of F is *like* a sensible instance of F.) If the relationship between Forms, sensibles and images in the *Republic* were one of distortion or misrepresentation, this would have far-reaching implications for the educational and political policies of the kallipolis. First, the guardians would not be allowed to consume *any* images of virtue, in poetry or otherwise, else they come to accept misrepresentations of virtue. Second, a philosopher-king's knowledge of the Forms would not qualify him or her to rule in the sensible realm, since knowledge of F would not enable one to identify a sensible instance of F, it being a distortion or misrepresentation (rather than a likeness) of the Form of F. Of course, Socrates accepts neither of these consequences. Consumption of images of good characters (in the form of poetry) is an integral part of the early education of the guardians (401c). Also, according to Socrates, the philosopher-king's knowledge of the Forms (in particular, the Forms of the virtues) uniquely qualifies him or her to rule in the sensible realm (484a-d). This certainly suggests that images of F and sensible instances of F are relevantly related to truth (i.e., the Forms), as opposed to misrepresenting or distorting truth. I take it that this much is clear, even in the absence of an account of how sensibles, Forms and images are metaphysically related and of how the metaphysical relationship between Forms and sensibles is analogous to that between sensibles and images. A final passage nicely illustrates my point that sensibles and images are relevantly related to truth (i.e. the Forms):

... am I not right in saying that neither we, nor the guardians we are raising, will be educated in music and poetry until we know the different Forms of moderation, courage, frankness, high-mindedness, and all their kindred, and their opposites too, which are



moving around everywhere, and see them in the things in which they are, both themselves and their images [εικόνας] ... (402c1-6).

In other words, being able to accurately identify sensible instances of virtue and images of virtue requires knowledge of the Forms of the virtues. Therefore, it cannot be the case that the relationship between Forms and sensibles and sensibles and images is one of radical distortion or misrepresentation. On that note, I shall now turn to present my positive interpretation of mimesis and the art of imitation in *Republic* Book X.

## II. The Art of Imitation and Illusion

The near universal (if not universal) assumption that the *Republic* contains some sort of metaphysical attack on imitative poetry is, I believe, the result of an unfortunate ambiguity in the initial stages of Socrates' definition of mimesis. In particular, Socrates sets out to define “mimesis as a whole” but concludes with a definition of a certain *sort* of mimesis; namely, “imitativeness” or the “art of imitation” [μιμητική]. In some sense, we should expect this. After all, Socrates begins Book X by exclaiming that they were right to ban *imitative* [μιμητική] poetry, which, as I indicated earlier, is non-equivalent to poetry that employs mimesis. In other words, from the start Socrates signals that *imitative* poetry— i.e., the product of the “art of imitation” - is his primary concern. Nevertheless, in order to define this more specific “art of imitation” Socrates first defines mimesis more generally. Mimesis in general is equivalent to making images of sensibles (596e-597e). As such, it is “two removes from truth.” Moss and others are right to invoke the Divided Line here; sensibles are to Forms what images are to sensibles, so far as truth is concerned. Images of sensibles are two removes from truth, because just as a sensible instance of F is *like* (albeit removed from) the Form of F, an image of F is *like* (albeit removed from) a sensible instance of F; images are likenesses of likenesses. Notably, only accurate or correct images will be removed from truth in this way (i.e., as being a likeness of a

likeness). In particular, the poetic images of virtue that constitute the early education of the guardians are images in this sense – i.e., likenesses of likenesses of virtue. It is precisely because these sorts of images are *relevantly related to truth* that they are utilized in the education of the young guardians.

These distinctions I am making are supported by the Greek. So, from 595c-597e, wherein Socrates defines “mimesis in general” as the production of images or likenesses of sensibles, he employs neutral terms for mimesis – i.e., terms that do not have the “-τικ” root (denoting an art) in them.<sup>68</sup> However, these are neither the sort of images nor the sort of mimesis that Socrates ultimately targets. Hence, after defining “mimesis in general” in this way (i.e., as the production of likenesses of sensibles), an important shift occurs at 598a. Socrates now inquires as to whether the painter imitates sensibles “as they are or as they appear” [οἷα ἔστιν ἢ οἷα φαίνεται], noting that this further distinction must be made (598a2). In other words, having defined mimesis in general, Socrates now proposes to make a further distinction or division within mimesis. Tellingly, it is at this crucial point in the argument that the passage about the perspectival appearances of the couch occurs; and only now is the imitator said to be ignorant of what he imitates as well as duplicitous, in the sense of deceiving foolish people into believing that his imitation of X reflects his knowledge of X. Also, it is here that Socrates first refers to the “art of imitation” [μιμητική], which copies “appearances” [εἶδωλα]. This “art of imitation” is “far removed” from truth (as opposed to two removes from truth), suggesting that its products - i.e., “mimetic images” or “appearances” [εἶδωλα] - are fundamentally unlike likenesses.

What are “εἶδωλα,” and how are they related to truth? Mimetic images - i.e., those appearances produced by the art of imitation - are not simply identical with those entities that occupy the lowest rung of the Divided Line. The neutral term for “images” is “εἰκόνες,” which

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68 Belfiore 1984.

Socrates employs in the Divided Line passage, where shadows and reflections are said to be “εἰκόνες” (509e). Importantly, whereas this term is never once used for mimetic images (which are referred to as εἶδολα, φαντάσματα and φαινόμενα), the term is applied to the images of good or allowed poetry, of the sort that forms the foundation of the guardians' early education (e.g., 401c, 402b-c). The one exception is when Socrates refers to Homer, Hesiod and other poets as “making an image” [εἰκάζειν] of what heroes and gods are like (377d9); but here Socrates is careful to say that such poets make images *badly* [κακῶς], in that their images are not at all *like* [ὅμοια] that which they are supposed to be images of. In other words, the Greek preserves the distinction that I am trying to make – i.e., the distinction between likenesses and spurious appearances or illusions, which mimetic images are said to be.

It still remains to explain what “further distinction” Socrates makes in specifying the art of imitation. Specifically, what is the nature of the distinction between imitating the couch “as it is” and “as it appears?” The strong temptation is to suppose that imitating the couch “as it is” involves imitating the Form of the couch. Only later in the argument does Socrates clarify what he means, in his remarks about illusion and the irrational part of the soul (602c-605c). Just as the skiagraphic painter, in painting a scene, copies the visual illusions that appear to an onlooker in virtue of her irrational part (e.g., that nearby objects are large and faraway objects are small); the imitative poet, in representing human affairs, copies the axiological illusions that appear to an onlooker in virtue of her irrational part (e.g., that the multicolored character is fine).<sup>69</sup> Mimetic images are the “joint progeny” of the mimetic poet and the irrational part of the soul, which, having been improperly trained, perceives excellence and value incorrectly. Thus, it is in virtue

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69 That Socrates shifts from talking about painting in general to a form of painting that copies visual illusions (i.e., skiagraphic painting) supports my claim that Socrates shifts from talking about mimesis in general (which copies likenesses) to the art of imitation, which copies illusions.

of our irrational part that an image of a vicious man (e.g., the democrat) incorrectly appears to be an image of a fine man and hence constitutes an illusory appearance of virtue. These points – which I defend in chapter 1 – imply that mimetic images distort truth because of something *in us*, not because of their metaphysical or ontological status as images. So, the deceptiveness of mimetic images has far less to do with their metaphysical status as images and far more to do with their relation to the irrational part of the soul.

Further evidence that Plato distinguishes between a form of mimesis that makes likenesses and a form of mimesis that makes illusions can be found in the *Sophist*. While I am sympathetic to Halliwell's view that Plato does not employ a unified concept of 'mimesis' throughout all of the dialogues,<sup>70</sup> the intertextuality between *Republic X* and the *Sophist* 232e-236c cannot be ignored.<sup>71</sup> The similarities are striking. In both discussions, painting is presented as a model of imitation, on the basis of which sophistry (in the *Sophist*) and poetry (in *Republic X*) are classified as imitation. In both discussions, the imitator is contrasted with the craftsman. Also, just as sophists deceive their pupils into believing that they are wise about *all things*, the imitator of *Republic X* deceives his audience into believing that he is wise about *all things*. However, the most important similarity for our purposes is that both *Republic X* and the *Sophist* distinguish between a form of mimesis that produces likenesses and a form of mimesis that produces illusions. So, in the *Sophist* the Visitor distinguishes two types of mimesis – φανταστική, which produces φαντάσματα, and εικαστική, which produces εικόνες. Whereas εικαστική produces an actual likeness of the object, φανταστική “abandons truth” and produces an *apparent* likeness of the object (235c-236c).<sup>72</sup> The Visitor cites the examples of sculpture and

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70 Halliwell 2002, 37-71.

71 See Notomi 2011, 311-316 on the intertextuality of *Republic X* and the *Sophist*.

72 Granted, later in the *Sophist* the Visitor proclaims “Καὶ μὴν ἀπάτης οὔσης εἰδώλων τε καὶ εἰκόνων ἤδη καὶ

painting. The painter (or sculptor) is a practitioner of εικαστική when he reproduces the proportions of the original figure. The painter (or sculptor) is a practitioner of φανταστική when he reproduces the proportions *which appear accurate from the skewed perspective of the viewer*. For instance, a painter or sculptor who produces a massive work of art enlarges the upper parts and shrinks the lower parts so as to accommodate the fact that the viewer falsely perceives far-away objects as small and close-up objects as large. Although such an artist departs from the proportions of the original, the reproduced proportions nevertheless appear accurate to viewers (who are situated far below the upper parts of the work), in virtue of the limitations of their faculty of perception. Just as the μμητικός of the *Republic*, this artist both imitates and produces a perspective that in some sense misrepresents what it is a perspective of.

That said, there is one notable difference between the *Sophist* and *Republic X*. The *Sophist* distinguishes between two different “arts of imitation;” in contrast, in *Republic X* the “art of imitation” refers *only* to φαντάσματα-making and not to εικόνες-making. I strongly suspect that Plato calls φαντάσματα-making an “art of imitation” in the *Republic* in order to emphasize that φαντάσματα-making is not subordinate to any other, legitimate art. Hence, Homer, Hesiod and other imitative Greek poets are faulted for not consulting “expert users” of virtue (i.e., the “craftsmen of the city's freedom,” philosopher-kings), so as to acquire right opinion about human virtue. In contrast, εικόνες-making in the *Republic* (i.e., the production of accurate poetic images of virtue) is subordinated to the political art, whose practitioners determine what is and is not an accurate image of virtue, compelling the poets to only compose accurate images of virtue (391d).

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φαντασίας πάντα ἀνάγκη μεστὰ εἶναι” (260c8-9). Here, ostensibly, Plato characterizes “εἰκόνες” as constituting a class of *deceptive* images, along with φαντάσματα. However, it is entirely plausible that the visitor intends the following: a world must be full of accurate images [εἰκόνες] and inaccurate images [εἰδόλα and φαντάσματα] for there to be deception.

Because εικόνες-making is subordinate to the political art, Socrates does not refer to it as an “art” in its own right.

In any case, regardless of why the *Sophist* extends the art of imitation to cover likeness-making as well, the point remains that for Plato imitating sensibles “as they are” (in both *Republic X* and the *Sophist*) requires reproducing what sensibles are *really* like (as opposed to what they *look* like), where this practice is not equivalent to imitating Forms. The likeness-maker's reproduction of the correct proportions (or the correct valuation) of the original does not involve imitating Forms; rather, it involves imitating those sensible properties in virtue of which the original is *like* the Forms in which it participates. Therefore, likeness-making involves making a likeness of a likeness of a Form and so is connected to truth in an important way. In contrast, in both *Republic X* and the *Sophist*, to imitate a sensible *as it appears* (as opposed to *as it is*) is to reproduce the way that it appears to the cognitively disadvantaged, whose perspective of said sensible is severely distorted.

In conclusion, my interpretation meets the three parameters enumerated at the start, in that I have specified in what sense mimetic images and likenesses are removed from truth, as well as shown that axiological instances of mimetic images corrupt the soul because they constitute *illusions* of virtue of value. Also, I have shown how Socrates targets *imitative* poetry (i.e., poetry produced by the “art of imitation”), as opposed to non-imitative poetry, which accurately represents what it purports to imitate and so is an invaluable tool in the early education of the guardians.

### III. Reconciling the Accounts of Μιμητική in Books III and X

However, a final problem remains. It is unclear how this “art of imitation” (later renamed φανταστική in the *Sophist*) connects with the account of imitativeness in *Republic III*, according to which imitative poetry contains multiple “impersonations” - i.e., imitations in voice and body

– of many different characters. A popular view, originated by Belfiore,<sup>73</sup> is that to be imitative in the pejorative sense of Book III is to be “multiply imitative” - i.e., to imitate in voice and body *many different characters*, and not just the good character. The worry is twofold: in imitating many characters, the guardians will become “two or more people simultaneously,” hence violating the Principle of Specialization (397d9); and in imitating bad characters, the guardians will become bad characters themselves (395c-d).

However, two problems arise in reconciling imitativeness [μιμητική] in Book III with imitativeness in Book X. First, whereas in Book III Socrates is concerned with the impersonation aspect of poetry (i.e., likening *oneself* to characters), in Book X Socrates is concerned with the image-producing aspect of poetry. Second, it is not clear what being “multiply imitative” has to do with imitativeness as I have defined it in Book X – i.e., as the practice of copying illusory appearances.

The first, more general problem is not really a problem, once we appreciate that Socrates is concerned with different aspects of the art of imitation in Book III and Book X. In Book III Socrates is concerned with the effects of μιμητική on the μιμητικός – i.e., on the individual who, in performing or reciting poetry, impersonates various characters. Over time, such an individual actually becomes the multifarious, vicious characters that he assimilates himself to in imitation. It is not surprising that Socrates focuses on μιμητική from a performance perspective in Book III, given that Book III addresses the guardians' education and that reciting poetry was a common Greek educational practice, requiring that one assimilate herself to poetry characters.<sup>74</sup> However, in Book X Socrates focuses on μιμητική from an audience perspective, where the question becomes, “What effects do the appearances produced by impersonation have on the audience of

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73 Belfiore 1984.

74 Havelock 1963.

drama?” In other words, impersonation and producing appearances can be seen as two aspects of the same practice; namely, that of μιμητική. In impersonating various characters the actor (or poet) produces the image of a man engaged in action (603c). Put another way, impersonation is the medium or mechanism through which performed or recited poetry produces its images. Therefore, the impersonation aspect and image-producing aspect of μιμητική are intimately intertwined.

With regard to the second problem, here I must disagree with Belfiore that the essence of the art of imitation is “imitating many things” or being “multiply imitative.” To be sure, the practitioner of the art of imitation often imitates many things, and Socrates finds this problematic, insofar as it violates the Principle of Specialization, according to which each citizen must perform one occupation and be one person (394e-395a, 397d). However, in Book III Socrates bans imitative poetry but permits impersonation of bad (as well as good) characters, provided that one impersonates bad characters in play and not “seriously” [σπουδῆ] (396d4-e1, 397a3). Although Socrates is not explicit about what he means by “serious,” for the accounts of μιμητική in Book III and Book X to be consistent “seriously impersonating” a character must involve impersonating a character *as though he were good* – i.e., in such a way so as to give the audience the impression that the character *is* good. So, to seriously impersonate bad characters would involve impersonating a bad character as though he were good, thereby making it “appear” (to the audience) that the character is in fact good. Therefore, if we accept the not implausible suggestion that Book III defines the μιμητικός as someone who impersonates many bad characters as though they were good and thereby produces the axiological illusion that vicious characters are good, then the practice of μιμητική in Book III is identical to that in Book X.<sup>75</sup>

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75 “Serious” imitation of bad characters might involve *more than* simply impersonating such characters as though



This interpretation receives some limited confirmation from Book X, wherein the audience of tragedy is said to “take seriously” and to “praise” the lamentation of the hero (605d-e), which might seem to suggest that taking the hero's lamentation seriously (on the part of the audience) involves regarding it as good or fine in some way. So, it is not implausible that in seriously impersonating lamentation the actor represents it as good or fine in some way. The actor might accomplish this effect by impersonating a lamenting man and simultaneously appearing to impersonate a hero, god or other highly esteemed personage. By impersonating a lamenting man and simultaneously appearing to impersonate a highly esteemed hero, the poet or actor produces the illusory appearance that lamentation is fine – i.e., that it is the sort of behavior that highly esteemed personages engage in. And indeed, it is on this very assumption that, in Book III, Socrates proposes “to delete the lamentations of famous men, leaving them to women (and not even good women, either) and to cowardly men, so that those we say we are training to guard our city will disdain acting like that” (377e9-388a2). It is also possible (as Ferrari suggests) that in distinguishing between serious and non-serious impersonation Socrates distinguishes between non-satirical and satirical forms of impersonation and that serious, non-satirical impersonation gives the audience the impression that the object of imitation is fine or at

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they were good, which is why I do not say that seriously impersonating bad characters is *equivalent to* impersonating bad characters as though they were good. Unfortunately, Socrates does not tell us what, exactly, he means by “serious” (as opposed to “play”) in this context. Serious imitation might involve patterning one's inward, mental states on another character, as opposed to merely copying the “outward” responses of a character. It might also involve *enjoying* impersonating another character and/or regarding the character as good or fine in some respects. See Ferrari 1989, 118-119 for an interesting discussion of this topic. According to Ferrari, in allowing unserious impersonation of bad characters Socrates is allowing for “satirical” impersonation of bad characters.

least not shameful – i.e., that it is something to be taken “seriously,” as opposed to laughed at.<sup>76</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, Book III and Book X can be said to operate with a unified conception of μιμητική, as copying illusions, whether in voice or voice and body (as with recited or performed poetry respectively), or in colors and shadings (as with skiagraphic painting). The difference is that Book III is concerned with the effects of μιμητική on the performer, whereas Book X is concerned with the effects of μιμητική on the audience. Thus, each book approaches the art of imitation from a different angle, which reflects the different aims of the two books.

This concludes my argument that Book X does not contain a metaphysical or ontological argument against mimesis or poetry. In the next chapter I argue that my thesis accords with Plato's own practice as the author of dramatic dialogues. The fact that Plato himself is a dramatic poet of sorts provides further confirmation for my thesis that Plato is a poetry revisionist, who critiques contemporary Greek poetry on purely ethical or psychological grounds.

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76 Ferrari 1989, 119. For the senses of play [παιδιά] as 'jesting,' 'comedy' and 'satire' see Aristotle, *Nicomachean*

*Ethics* 4.1128a19-24.

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## CHAPTER 3

### **Plato's *Phaedo* as a Pedagogical Drama**

The *Phaedo* has long been recognized as dramatic in nature.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the dialogue's dramatic portrayal of a Herculean Socrates attacking the heads of a hydra naturally invites this assessment (89c). Also, Socrates' death scene is particularly dramatic. Fifteen companions, the exact number of a tragic chorus, surround the dying Socrates and lament (117c-d).<sup>78</sup> Reflection on this scene has prompted scholars to speculate that it is intended to “lend moving force” to the tragic perspective and to “rouse” readers' emotions.<sup>79</sup>

Despite all of the scholarly discussion about the dialogue's status as drama, a number of key questions have yet to be satisfactorily and systematically answered: (Q1) What is drama? (Q2) What is the *Phaedo* a drama about? (Q3) What is the function, if any, of the dramatic elements of the *Phaedo*? In this paper I undertake to answer these questions. I conclude with some thoughts about Plato's purpose in writing dramatic dialogues and Plato's attitude toward poetry. One of my aims throughout will be to demonstrate how a proper understanding of the literary dimension of the *Phaedo* sheds light on the philosophical content of the dialogue.

#### I. Defining Drama

Ruby Blondell defines drama as the imaginative presentation of persons and acts, where

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Jowett 1892, 193.

<sup>78</sup> In addition to the 14 companions named at 59b-c, Crito was present. See Crotty 2009, 66.

<sup>79</sup> See Halliwell 1984, 57-58 and Crotty 2009, 87 (respectively).

the authorial voice is “suppressed.”<sup>80</sup> Drama is “imaginative” insofar as it represents persons and acts *as imagined* by the author. So, for instance, a courtroom transcript is not a drama but a record.

Blondell seeks confirmation of her definition in the views of Plato and Aristotle, the intellectual forbears of our modern notion of 'drama.' According to Plato and Aristotle, poetry represents persons in action (*Republic* 603c3-4, *Poetics* 1448a1-2); and dramatic poetry is poetry absent authorial narration (*Rep* 394b-c, *Poet* 1448a19-24). In *Republic* III the dramatic poet is said “to assimilate” [ὁμοιοῦν] his speech to each character, speaking “as” [ὡς] him or her (*Rep* 393b-c, 394c). He “impersonates” rather than “narrates;” that is to say, he uses his voice and figure to imitate characters (*Rep* 393b). In like manner, Aristotle describes the dramatist as “becoming someone other” [ἕτερόν τι γινόμενον] (*Poet* 1448a21-22). The tragic dramatist imitates human action by representing humans *doing* [δρώντων] rather than “through a report” [δι' ἀπαγγελίας] (*Poet* 1449b26-27). So, for example, *Oedipus Rex* is dramatic in form, because Sophocles (a) imaginatively represents (rather than records) persons doing things and (b) impersonates (rather than narrates) the speech of Oedipus, Jocasta, Tiresias, et al.

To be sure, this conception of the playwright as an “impersonator” is the artifact of an earlier age, when poetry was commonly composed and transmitted orally, through performances. What is important for our purposes is that drama presents characters, their speech and their actions “directly,” rather than “through” the narration of the author.

As Blondell points out, on her definition of drama every Platonic dialogue is a drama. This is because every Platonic dialogue imaginatively represents persons in action; namely, persons *doing* philosophy. What is more, the author, Plato, directly presents persons in action (as opposed to narrating).

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80 Blondell 2002, 16.

However, surely not every Platonic dialogue is a drama. For example, the *Timaeus* reads more like a philosophical treatise than a dialogue, much less a *dramatic* dialogue. Indeed, Plato's later dialogues generally place far less emphasis on storyline and characterization, with the result that they lack emotional appeal. The *Timaeus* is not a story *about people*, in that (a) it does not portray the “characters” or “personalities” of the interlocutors and (b) the main “action” of the dialogue (i.e., philosophical discussion) has no demonstrated bearing on the *lives* of the interlocutors. In the absence of characters whose plights and personalities engage our sympathies, a philosophical dialogue is unlikely to evoke our emotions, except incidentally.

Plato and Aristotle also implicitly adhere to the criterion that drama be *about people*, in the strong sense enunciated above. For example, Aristotle distinguishes tragedy from comedy on the basis of the sorts of characters each represents; tragedy represents characters who are “better than ourselves,” and comedy represents characters who are “worse than ourselves” (*Poet* 1448a15-17). And Plato criticizes Greek poets for imitating multicolored [ποικίλος] and irritable characters rather than rational and quiet characters (*Rep* 604d-e). Indeed, the supposition that dramatic poetry portrays *personalities* (and not just *persons*) underpins the censorship program of *Republic* II-III, which revolves around the kinds of characters poets represent. Moreover, in addition to representing characters, the dramatic poet represents actions which are of practical significance to the agent(s). So, in *Republic* X Socrates says that poets imitate persons in action, “who believe that, as a result of these actions, they are doing either well or badly and who experience either pleasure or pain in all of this” (603c4-6).<sup>81</sup>

Unlike the *Timaeus*, the *Gorgias* satisfies the criterion that drama be about people. The Socrates of the *Gorgias* does not just refute abstract philosophical propositions but each interlocutor's *way of life*, as reflected in his character and personality. The “drama” of the

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81 Throughout I use the Grube and Reeve 1992 translation of the *Republic*.

*Gorgias* centers around whether or not the gentle and good-natured Socrates will vindicate his life – the life of philosophy - over the pleasure and power seeking life advocated and exemplified by an irascible and aggressive duo, Polus and Callicles. Naturally, emotions run high, since the outcome of the philosophical discussion will determine the value (if any) of each interlocutor's way of life.

No doubt, Plato had many reasons for writing dramatic dialogues. I cannot touch on all of them here. However, in the case of the *Gorgias*, Charles Kahn speculates that the dramatic aspects of the dialogue – i.e., the literary depiction of personalities and the tight connection between philosophical discussion and ways of life – serve to foster readers' admiration of Socrates and the Socratic way of life.<sup>82</sup> In my view, the *Phaedo* operates similarly.

Given the criterion that drama be about people, it is no surprise that drama nearly always engages (or intends to engage) our emotions. We come to care for the characters, whose personalities and lives engage our imaginations. Indeed, both Plato and Aristotle devote considerable attention to this emotional dimension of drama, especially with regard to tragedy (e.g., *Rep* 605c-d, 606a-b; *Poet* 1449b21-29, 1452a4).

So, to amend Blondel's formulation in light of these considerations, drama is the imaginative and direct presentation of persons, their characters and their actions, where said actions *matter* within the larger context of the characters' lives. Drama also typically arouses the emotions of audiences.

What of the performance aspects of drama, like music, dance or meter? Although Plato and Aristotle associate meter, melody and dance with Greek dramatic poetry, neither philosopher conceives of these features as essential to dramatic poetry. Aristotle assumes that meter and melody are mere “pleasurable accessories” [ἡδύσματα] (*Poet* 1449b26, 1450b16-17). He adds

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<sup>82</sup> See Kahn 1983.

that tragic drama accomplishes its effect whether it is performed or privately read (*Poet* 1450b16-20, 1462a11-17); the “spectacle” [ὄψις] is not the aim of tragedy (*Poet* 1450b16-20). In like manner, Plato refers to meter and melody as mere “musical colorings,” obscuring the true nature of a poem (*Rep* 601a-b). Like Plato and Aristotle, we also consider a play to be a drama, whether or not it is performed. However, we would surely hesitate to call a literary work a drama, if it did not directly and imaginatively represent persons (or anthropomorphized beings), their characters and their actions. Furthermore, although it is possible that certain dramas lack emotional appeal, most do not. In fact, the connection between drama and emotion is so deeply rooted in our own thinking that we call a thing “dramatic” in virtue of its emotional nature. Thus, although emotional appeal is not necessarily an essential component of drama, it is nevertheless a familiar and recurring trait in that family of things we call 'drama' and the 'dramatic.'

## II. The *Phaedo* as Drama

### a. Socrates the Poet

Does the *Phaedo*, like the *Gorgias*, qualify as drama in our sense? Before I answer this question, I wish to point out that the dialogue invites this question, insofar as it represents Socrates as both a philosopher and a poet. I propose that Plato's portrayal of Socrates as both a philosopher and a poet is an important clue as to how we are to conceive of Plato himself, qua author of the *Phaedo*. It can be no coincidence that in one of Plato's most dramatic, poetic works Socrates emerges as a veritable “philosopher poet.”

In order to appreciate the sense in which the Socrates of the *Phaedo* practices both poetry and philosophy, we must first examine the *Phaedo*'s characterization of the poet. Early on, Socrates refers to the poet as a “teller of tales” [μυθολογικός]; Socrates declares that “a poet, if he is to be a poet, must compose stories [μύθους], not arguments [λόγους]” (61b3). Socrates playfully pleads that he is not a μυθολογικός in order to placate the poet Evenus, who fears that



Socrates seeks to rival him (60c-61b). However, in the same Stephanus page Socrates proposes “to tell tales” [μυθολογεῖν] about the afterlife (61e2). Moreover, when Socrates is about to die, he makes good on his proposal, telling an elaborate tale [μῦθος]<sup>83</sup> about the blessings awaiting the philosopher in the afterlife (107d-114c). Socrates even likens himself to a swan on the verge of death, who sings about the blessings of the afterlife, having received the gift of prophecy from Apollo (84e-85b). The clear implication is that Socrates' eschatological myth is the poetic “swan song” of Socrates, qua servant of Apollo.<sup>84</sup>

However, it is not immediately obvious why Socrates should practice poetry in his final moments. After all, at the outset of the dialogue, Socrates famously remarks that philosophy, not poetry, is the highest “μουσική” (Muse-inspired art) (61a2).<sup>85</sup> Also, while Socrates' myth is, no doubt, inspired by his philosophical vision, it is not philosophy proper, which the dialogue represents as the committed search for truth through argument (65b-d). Having devoted the majority of the day to philosophy proper (i.e., the arguments for the immortality of the soul), Socrates now practices the popular μουσική of poetry. Why?

Answering this question requires that we pay close attention to the beginning of the dialogue, especially 60e-61b. Therein, Socrates claims that he has, of late, composed poetry in response to a recurring dream, which bids him to practice and cultivate μουσική. Socrates explains that he had always assumed that “μουσική” referred to the μουσική of philosophy, this being the “highest μουσική” (60e5-61a3). However, just in case the dream had actually been bidding him to practice the “popular μουσική” of poetry, Socrates takes it upon himself to

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83 See 114d 6.

84 Recall, in the *Apology* Socrates considers his cross-examining of purportedly wise Athenians to be a service to the god of the Delphic oracle (i.e., Apollo) (23b, 29d).

85 See Morgan 2010 for a recent discussion of divination in the *Phaedo*.

compose hymns to Apollo and versifications of Aesop's fables in his final days (61a-b). Therefore, it seems likely that the eschatological myth - Socrates' Apollonian “swan song” - is a continuation of this project. Having devoted his last day to the highest μουσική of philosophy, Socrates now returns to the popular μουσική of poetry, in order to convince himself that he has obeyed the dream. In so doing, Socrates the philosopher becomes Socrates the poet – a philosophically inspired “μυθολογικός” of the highest order. Again, it is noteworthy that in one of Plato's most poetic, dramatic dialogues Socrates engages in both poetry and philosophy. Mightn't Socrates' preoccupation with poetry in the *Phaedo* reflect Plato's own preoccupation with poetry qua author of the *Phaedo*?

And indeed, the *Phaedo* is dramatic in form. The *Phaedo* is an imaginative presentation of persons, absent authorial narration. The *Phaedo* is not a transcript of Socrates' death, since Plato was not present (59b8). Also, Plato does not narrate the exchange between Phaedo and Echekrates but “speaks” *as* Phaedo and *as* Echekrates. Moreover, Phaedo, in recounting Socrates' last day, speaks *as* each character, with the result that we read the speech of Simmias and Cebes directly.

However, is the *Phaedo* drama simpliciter? Specifically, does the *Phaedo* represent the characters and actions of persons, where those actions are of practical significance to the interlocutors? Also, does the dialogue appeal to our emotions? In what follows, I shall answer both questions in the affirmative. Not only shall my interpretation of the *Phaedo* resolve interpretive difficulties commonly associated with the *Phaedo*, it will also have important implications for two crucial areas of Plato scholarship; namely, Plato's practice as author and Plato's attitude toward poetry.

#### b. The Dramatic Structure of the *Phaedo*

In *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* Martha

Nussbaum writes:

There are, of course, Platonic dialogues in which something humanly moving is taking place: the *Crito* and the *Phaedo* are obvious cases. In these dialogues the initial reaction of certain interlocutors is to feel grief or pity. But the dialogue explicitly teaches that these are immature and unhelpful responses. Xanthippe weeps and is escorted out of the room (60A). Socrates reproves Apollodorus for his womanish tears (117D); we are supposed to apply his reprimand to ourselves. *Phaedo* repeatedly insists that he felt no pity (58E, 59A); nor should we. Socrates leads the interlocutors on from the personal to the general, from the emotional to the intellectual; so the dialogue leads us on. The action of the *Phaedo* is not the death of Socrates; it is the committed pursuit of the truth about the soul. In it Socrates shows us how to rise above tragedy to inquiry.<sup>86</sup>

In a later article, Nussbaum contrasts Xanthippe and Apollodorus to Socrates: “Socrates the hero, by contrast, confidently pursues the search for understanding; and the ‘drama’ in question becomes the drama of argumentation, to be pursued by the intellect alone.”<sup>87</sup> Nussbaum has two points: (1) the *Phaedo* is intended to engage the intellect, not the emotions and (2) the “drama” and “action” of the *Phaedo* consists in abstract dialectic irrespective of personal, practical consequences. Hence, on our definition of drama, the *Phaedo* would not qualify as drama, since (a) the true “action” of the *Phaedo* (i.e., argument) is of theoretical, not practical, importance<sup>88</sup> and (b) the dialogue discourages emotional responses.<sup>89</sup>

In what follows I shall counter both of Nussbaum's points. I shall argue that the action of the *Phaedo* is of the deepest practical importance to the lives of the interlocutors. In the process I shall uncover the dramatic structure of the dialogue, as well as the nature of its emotional appeal.

To uncover the dramatic structure of the *Phaedo* we must consider what is at stake in the dialogue and for whom. A number of scholars go wrong insofar as they assume that what is at stake in the dialogue must be at stake *for Socrates*, despite Socrates' relative equanimity

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86 Nussbaum 2001, revised ed., 131.

87 Nussbaum 1992, 126.

88 See Tarrant 1955 for an earlier version of this view.

89 See Kuhn 1941, 25-26 for an earlier version of this view.

throughout the dialogue.<sup>90</sup> However, the “drama” of the *Phaedo* revolves around the plight of Socrates' companions. When Socrates is about to die, the companions dwell on the great misfortune [συμφορά] that has befallen *them* (116a). And, as Socrates expires, Phaedo weeps not for Socrates but for *himself* at *his own* “τύχη” of being deprived of such a companion (117c-d). It is noteworthy that Echekrates expresses sympathy for the companions, not Socrates (88c). Even Xanthippe pities the companions first and Socrates second, when she shrieks and says, “Socrates, this is the last time your friends will talk to you and you to them”<sup>91</sup> (60a5-6). In sharp contrast, Socrates staunchly refuses to regard his death as a great evil and either dismisses or corrects those who feel otherwise (84d-e, 115d-e). Strikingly, Phaedo commences his narrative of Socrates' death only after recounting his lack of pity for Socrates and his belief that Socrates would go to Hades with a good μοῖρα (58e-59a).

In losing Socrates the companions are not merely losing an acquaintance. The loss of Socrates signifies the loss of him who “charms away” the companions’ fear of death (77e-78a), a disease of the soul. According to Socrates, the man who fears death, in his anxiety over soul-body separation, evinces a deep-seated attachment to the body, which necessarily embroils him in the pursuit of bodily concerns rather than the procurement of wisdom, a psychic good (68b-69b).<sup>92</sup> Since, according to Socrates, wisdom is an excellence of the soul and hence constitutive

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90 For example, Arieti 1991 argues that the courage of Socrates is at stake; Socrates ultimately proves his courage by failing to prove the immortality of the soul, since dying courageously requires that one be in doubt about the immortality of one's soul.

91 Throughout I use the Grube 1977 translation of the *Phaedo*.

92 The philosopher, by contrast, longs for death because then (and only then) is his soul liberated from the body and its attendant fears, desires, pleasures and pains, all of which impede the soul's search for truth and wisdom (66a-e).

of virtue (69a-c),<sup>93</sup> the fear of death imperils soul health and virtue by preventing one from pursuing wisdom. Tellingly, the dialogue explicitly identifies the danger Socrates' death poses to the souls of his companions. Cebes remarks, “Where shall we find a good charmer for these fears, Socrates, now that you are leaving us” (78a1-2)? In reply, Socrates implores the companions to “spare neither trouble nor expense” in search of such a charmer, “for there is nothing on which you could spend your money to greater advantage” (78a4-7). Such a charmer betters the soul, and it is Socrates' dying wish that the companions care for their souls (115b). So, this exchange between Socrates and Cebes regarding the fear of death points to the precarious fate of the companions' souls in the absence of him who “charms away” the fear of death. Nevertheless, Socrates is hopeful that the companions will discover such a charmer amongst themselves (78a7-8). In fact, as the dialogue unfolds, much of the dramatic action consists in Socrates' valiant efforts to bequeath to the companions affective and intellectual prerequisites for bettering their souls. Socrates – qua poet and philosopher – employs two sorts of “charms” toward this end: argument and myth.

Socrates' first “charm” is the Affinity Argument (78b-83b),<sup>94</sup> intended to persuade Cebes' “inner child” that the soul does not dissolve upon death (77d-e). The Affinity Argument establishes that the purified soul of the philosopher does not “scatter” or “dissipate” at death,

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93 To be precise, Socrates says, “. . . in truth, moderation and courage and justice are a purging [κάθαρσις] away of all such things [bodily affections], and wisdom itself is a kind of cleansing or purificatory rite [καθαυμός]” (69b6-c1). So, each virtue (including wisdom) is a kind of purification of the soul. It does not follow that each virtue names the very same thing (i.e., the purification of the soul), because each particular virtue may very well represent a particular aspect of purification. For example, courage might be the purification or purging of fears associated with the body.

94 This is not the first time Plato describes Socrates' arguments as “charms” or “incantations.” See *Symposium* 215c-216b and *Republic* 608a.

because it is “like” the divine, deathless, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, etc. The fate of the impure soul is unknown. The Affinity Argument sends a clear message: “Do not fear death; take care of your soul.”

However, Simmias and Cebes remain unpersuaded by the Affinity Argument (84d). Both voice counterarguments. Even Socrates admits that “there are still many doubtful points and many objections for anyone who wants a thorough discussion of these matters” (84c5-7). Still, the companions are persuaded by the Recollection Argument for the preexistence of the soul before birth (92a), despite their doubts as regards the Affinity Argument and the Cyclical Argument.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, both Simmias and Cebes deny any grounds for doubting the Final Argument, the last argument offered in support of the immortality of the soul (107a-b). Nevertheless, Simmias still possesses some “inner distrust” [ἀπιστία ... παρ' ἐμμαντῶ] as regards the Final Argument, owing to the “importance of the subject matter” and his own “low opinion of human weakness” (107a8-9). Importantly, Socrates responds encouragingly to Simmias, saying, “you are not only right to say this ... but our first hypotheses require clearer examination, even though we find them convincing” (107b1-3).<sup>96</sup>

Why are some of the arguments (i.e., the Cyclical Argument and the Affinity Argument) unconvincing? Why does Socrates applaud Simmias' distrust of the Final Argument, despite his and the companions' acceptance of its first hypotheses (i.e., the theory of the Forms)?

Commentators have long grappled with these interpretive questions, and I will return to them

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95 The companions' doubt with regard to the Cyclical Argument is implied at 77c-d.

96 See Blank 1986 for a useful discussion of this passage. Here I must disagree with the interpretation of Sedley 1995, 14-21 according to which Simmias' inner distrust reflects his status as a “misologue” (i.e., a “hater of argument”). First, this interpretation fails to account for Socrates' encouraging response. Second, insofar as Simmias blames human weakness for his doubt (and not the arguments themselves), he is the antithesis of a misologue, as described at 90c-d.

shortly. For the time being, I wish only to point out that Socrates clearly intends *some* of the arguments to be persuasive.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, Socrates draws the following conclusion from his series of arguments for the immortality of the soul:

It is right to think then, gentlemen, that if the soul is immortal, it requires our care not only for the time we call our life, but for the sake of all time, and that one is in terrible danger if one does not give it that care. If death were escape from everything, it would be a great boon to the wicked to get rid of the body and of their wickedness together with their soul. But now that the soul appears to be immortal, there is no escape from evil or salvation for it except by becoming as good and wise as possible ... (107c1-d2).

Given that Socrates attempts to convince the companions to care for their souls *on the basis of* the arguments for the immortality of the soul, he clearly believes that the arguments are persuasive, even if they do not settle the matter and are not “finally persuasive.”<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the arguments are of practical (and not just theoretical) importance, insofar as they function to convince the companions to care for their souls. To suppose that Socrates remains unconvinced by the arguments overlooks the fact that Socrates dies calmly, unperturbed by the prospect of death. As Socrates himself suggests, his dying in this manner demonstrates his acceptance of the arguments (91a-b).

In sum, the success of the arguments for the immortality of the soul is of practical (and not just theoretical) importance to the companions. This is because the arguments are intended to (a) remove an obstacle to the companions' pursuit of wisdom and soul care (i.e., the fear of death) and (b) persuade the companions to care for their souls. As such, the arguments are an important

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<sup>97</sup> See Gallop 2003, 317 and Sedley 1995, 17-18 for the view that the arguments are not intentionally fallacious and are in fact intended to be convincing.

<sup>98</sup> While the Final Argument is taken to be persuasive, it is not necessarily “finally persuasive” or intended to be the final word on the topic. It is not sufficient to satisfy the companions (nor should it be), until the companions go over the reasoning again and again, from different starting points. Socrates is satisfied with the arguments presumably because he himself has gone through this process of reasoning. See Blank 1986.

part of the dramatic action of the *Phaedo*, which centers around the fate of the companions' souls in the absence of their soul nurturer. Two of the dramatic metaphors employed in the *Phaedo* bring this point into sharper focus.

First, when Socrates drinks the poison, the companions feel like “orphans” who have lost their “father” (116a). As if to lend dramatic force to this simile, Socrates' biological children enter the jail cell (116b). Socrates “fathers” the companions by fathering their souls. Recall, Socrates soothes the companions' “inner child” [ἐν ἡμῖν παῖς], who “fears death like a bogey” (77e5). Perhaps the most striking image of Socrates as soul father occurs at 88c-91c, after Simmias and Cebes voice their counterarguments to the theory of the immortality of the soul. The companions' former confidence in Socrates' arguments is replaced by desolation and distrust of argument (88c-d). At this low point, Socrates, sitting above Phaedo, strokes Phaedo's head, pressing his hair onto the back of his neck (89a-b). Importantly, this quintessentially fatherly gesture occurs at the very same moment that Socrates seeks to save the companions' souls from misology.

The danger of misology looms large in the dialogue. After the companions and Echekrates lose faith in argument (88c-d), Socrates warns that “there is no greater evil one can suffer than to hate arguments” (89d2-3). Like the fear of death, misology is an obstacle to the pursuit of wisdom. This is because argument is the very vehicle by which one achieves wisdom. At 89b7-c6 Phaedo recounts how Socrates, stroking Phaedo's hair, addressed him:

Socrates: It is today, he said, that I shall cut my hair and you yours, if our argument dies on us, and we cannot revive it. If I were you, and the argument escaped me, I would take an oath, as the Argives did, not to let my hair grow before I fought again and defeated the argument of Simmias and Cebes.

Phaedo: But, I said, they say that not even Heracles could fight two people.

Socrates: Then call on me to be your Iolaus, as long as the daylight lasts.

Phaedo: I shall call on you, but in this case as Iolaus calling on Heracles (89b9-c6).

Not only does the dramatic metaphor underscore the fact that the arguments are of practical (and



not just theoretical) importance to the interlocutors; it reveals something about the relationship between the companions and Socrates, as well as the nature of the dangers confronting the companions.

The dramatic metaphor refers to the second labor of Hercules; in particular, to Hercules' slaughter of the Lernean Hydra, a many-headed serpent. As the story goes, when Hercules initially severed one of the hydra's heads, two more grew back. Simultaneously, a giant crab attacked Hercules. Overwhelmed, Hercules called his nephew, Iolaus, to his aid. Together the pair chopped off the hydra's heads and torched the neck stumps in order to prevent their regrowth. In the process, Hercules crushed the crab underneath his giant foot.

Two points warrant mentioning. First, Socrates describes himself as Iolaus, not Hercules. Phaedo objects, insisting that he be Iolaus and Socrates be Hercules. In the companions' eyes, Socrates is “uncle Hercules,” a father figure. Interestingly, Socrates does not readily assume this role. Just as Socrates earlier encouraged the companions to search for a soul charmer amongst themselves (78a7-8), Socrates now exhorts Phaedo to be Hercules and to lead the charge against the hydra. Whereas Socrates urges the companions to become autonomous in their pursuit of wisdom, the companions are reluctant to give up their soul father.

The metaphor is important for another reason as well, insofar as it illuminates exactly what is at stake for the companions. What does the hydra correspond to, and what does the crab correspond to? Although initially the pair appears to refer to the two counterarguments of Simmias and Cebes, it is noteworthy that Socrates refers to “*the argument*” [λόγος] of Simmias and Cebes as a singular entity and immediately goes on to emphasize another danger in the vicinity; namely, the threat of misology (89d-e). Therefore, it seems likely that the threat of misology corresponds to the giant crab. Just as the giant crab prevents Hercules from effectively vanquishing the hydra; the companions' potential misology imperils Socrates' attempts to use

argument to vanquish the objections of Simmias and Cebes. The objections of Simmias and Cebes correspond to two heads of the hydra, which itself represents the aforementioned “bogey” feared by the companions – i.e. the possibility of the soul's dissolution at death (77d-e). Socrates had slayed one head of the bogey only to witness two heads grow back – i.e., the twin objections of Simmias and Cebes.<sup>99</sup> As this dramatic metaphor makes clear, the arguments are an integral part of the dramatic action of the dialogue. However, it is not simply the “fate of the logos” which swings in the balance, but also the fate of the companions' souls.

Just as Hercules employs a dual strategy to eliminate the hydra's heads (i.e., severing the heads and burning the neck stumps); Socrates employs both argument and myth to combat the companions' psychic ills and to put them on the path to soul care. This is because Socrates is concerned that the companions may fail to live according to the tracks he has laid down, even if they accept his arguments at present (115b-c). Immediately after Socrates cites this worry, Crito erroneously identifies Socrates with his corpse rather than his immortal soul, thereby exemplifying the quickness with which the tendrils of the possibility of nothingness after death reconquer the psyche (115c-d). Rational arguments can sever the heads of the frightful possibility of nothingness after death, but another sort of weapon is required to prevent the heads from regrowing.<sup>100</sup> For this reason, Socrates concludes both his first and second series of arguments with myths, which function to deal the final and permanent “death blow” to the terrible possibility of the soul's dissolution at death.

According to Socrates, the final myth reveals that the philosopher ought “to be of good courage” [θαρραῖν] about his own soul, because the afterlife is blissful for the philosopher (114d-

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<sup>99</sup> I have expanded on a line of interpretation which I owe to Dorter 1970, 570.

<sup>100</sup>As evidence of the quickness with which the possibility of nothingness after death reenters the psyche, consider that at the end of the dialogue Crito identifies Socrates with his corpse, rather than his immortal soul (115c-d).

115a). Hence, the myth should be repeated “as if it were an incantation” (114d5), presumably because it “charms away” the companions' aforementioned fear of death. So long as the companions pursue wisdom, virtue and soul health, death is not to be feared. In addition, this final myth, like the arguments, functions to convince the companions to care for their souls, as evidenced by Socrates' concluding remarks: “Because of the things we have enunciated, Simmias, one must make every effort to share in virtue and wisdom in one's life, for the reward is beautiful and the hope is great” (114c6-9).

One might wonder why myth, as opposed to argument, prevents the frightful possibility of nothingness after death from regrowing in the companions' souls. I suspect that Socrates intends the myth to “reshape” or “redirect” the companions' ineradicable, biologically-grounded fear of death. After all, according to Socrates, so long as the human soul is embodied, it experiences biologically grounded beliefs, desires and emotions, which can impair reasoning and interfere with the soul's search for truth (66b-d). Socrates' mythic portrayal of impure and vicious souls supports my hypothesis:

It wanders, as we are told, around graves and monuments, where shadowy phantoms, images that such souls produce, have been seen, souls that have not been freed and purified but share in the visible, and are therefore seen. . . . Moreover, these are not the souls of good but of inferior men, which are forced to wander there, paying the penalty for their previous bad upbringing. They wander until their longing for that which accompanies them, the physical, again imprisons them in a body, and they are then, as is likely, bound to such characters as they have practiced in their life (81d5-e3).

Those who are deemed incurable because of the enormity of their crimes, having committed many great sacrileges or wicked and unlawful murders and other such wrongs – their fitting fate is to be hurled into Tartarus never to emerge from it. Those who are deemed to have committed great but curable crimes . . . these must of necessity be thrown into Tartarus, but a year later the current throws them out . . . . After they have been carried along to the Acherousian lake, they cry out and shout, some for those they have killed, others for those they have maltreated, and calling them they then pray to them and beg them to allow them to step out into the lake and to receive them. If they persuade them, they do step out and their punishment comes to an end; if they do not, they are taken back into Tartarus and from there into the rivers, and this does not stop until they have persuaded those they have wronged, for this is the punishment which the judges

imposed on them (113e2-114b6).

Both myths play on a number of fears, especially the fear of bodily harm or discomfort. We cannot imagine wandering around graveyards without also imagining the biting cold. Similarly, we cannot imagine being flung into Tartarus without also imagining the currents ravaging our bodies. No doubt, Socrates is aware of this effect. Socrates redirects or “purifies”<sup>101</sup> the companions' biologically-based fear of bodily harm by focusing it on the fate of the soul rather than death. In so doing, Socrates lessens the companions' attachment to the body (and the care of it) and strengthens their attachment to the soul (and the care of it).

I grant that Socrates derides “exchanging fears for fears” as a kind of faux virtue at 69a-b. Real and true virtue occurs with wisdom, “whether pleasures and fears and all such things be present or absent” (69b3-4). However, insofar as pleasures and fears are a necessary part of embodied existence (66b), it follows that “earthly virtue” does not require the complete eradication of pleasures and fears. Rather, it is likely that earthly virtue requires the “purification” of desires and emotions – i.e., the training of emotions and desires to motivate, rather than impede, the soul's search for wisdom.

To be sure, this is slightly speculative; but I hope that the plausibility of my suggestion will become more apparent when I demonstrate the extent to which the *Phaedo* itself intends to evoke and control readers' emotions. To suppose (as many do) that the Socrates of the *Phaedo* is an ascetic who champions a complete detachment from all emotion overlooks the obvious emotional force of both Socrates' “swan song” (i.e., the myth) and the *Phaedo* itself.

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<sup>101</sup>This lends support to the earlier suggestion that courage consists in the “purification” [κάθαρσις] of fears associated with the body. The Greek term “κάθαρσις” can mean either “purging” or “purification.” However, given my hypothesis that Socrates endeavors to redirect or reshape (rather than eradicate) the companions' bodily fears, “purification” seems to be a better translation.

Appreciating the literary elements of the *Phaedo* sheds important light on the philosophical content of the *Phaedo*.

My emphasis on persuasion might seem to suggest that I class Socrates as a sort of sophist. I do not. Socrates does not wish to secure the companions' uncritical acceptance. On the contrary, Socrates blames credulity for misology. Misology arises when “one who lacks skill in arguments puts his trust in an argument as being true, then shortly afterwards believes it to be false ... and so with another argument and then another” (90b5-8). Such an individual will conclude that “there is no soundness or reliability in any object or in any argument” (90c2-3). In effect, two factors contribute to misology: (1) Credulity with regard to arguments and (2) Lack of skill in arguments. Thus, in order to effectively combat misology, Socrates must encourage the companions to be critical of arguments, as well as teach the companions skill in argument. This is precisely what Socrates does. As we have seen, Socrates actively encourages objections to his first series of arguments (84c), as well as encourages Simmias to reexamine the first hypotheses of the Final Argument (107b). Moreover, Socrates' introduction of a superior type of explanation (i.e., formal causes) (96a-100e) - as well as his methodological remarks about argument (101d-e) – should be seen as Socrates' last attempt to impart dialectical know-how to the companions. Not only does skill in argument protect the companions against misology, skill in argument enables the companions to effectively pursue wisdom and thereby purify their souls.

While the exact nature of Socrates' methodological remarks at 101d-e is the subject of scholarly debate and lies beyond the scope of this paper, some scholars (I think rightly) suggest that the remarks constitute advice on how to engage in “cooperative dialectic” or “joint inquiry,” not sophistical or eristic dialectic. Because the primary danger associated with cooperative dialectic is overly hasty agreement, Socrates offers Cebes advice on how to deal with an inquirer

who is determined “to cling to” [ἔχθεσθαι] the hypotheses.<sup>102</sup> And indeed, this interpretation aligns nicely with Socrates' insistence that Simmias reexamine the first hypotheses of their arguments, despite the fact that everyone present accepts them (107a).

In sum, Socrates not only seeks to pass on to the companions the affective prerequisites for soul care, but also the intellectual prerequisites for soul care. In order to teach the companions how to pursue wisdom through joint inquiry, Socrates must present the companions with opportunities to practice cooperative dialectic and to overcome dialectical setbacks. Thus, we should expect the initial arguments to be weak; for they enable Socrates to show the companions how to persist with a line of inquiry despite difficulties. Once again, attention to the dramatic elements of the *Phaedo* has philosophical and interpretive payoffs, in clarifying both the nature of Socrates' methodological remarks as well as the purpose of Socrates' several arguments for the immortality of the soul.

Having outlined the dramatic structure of the *Phaedo*, we are now in a position to examine the outcome of the drama. What is the fate of the companions' souls? Does Socrates succeed in curing the companions' psychic ills? Do the companions emerge as capable of “fathering their own souls” and pursuing wisdom through joint inquiry?

These are difficult questions, and to a large extent the question is left open, at least with regard to some of the companions. For example, it is doubtful that Crito and Apollodorus emerge

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<sup>102</sup>Sedley 1995, 16-17 argues for this interpretation, following the suggestion of Blank 1986, 146-163 that Socrates outlines the method of joint inquiry at 101d-e, not eristic dialectic. Both point out that translators and commentators erroneously translate the verb “ἔχθεσθαι” as “to object to” rather than “to cling to,” and consequently infer that Socrates offers Cebes advice on how to deal with an objector to his hypothesis. However, on a proper translation of “ἔχθεσθαι,” Socrates can be seen as offering Cebes advice on how to deal with a joint inquirer who uncritically “clings to” a hypothesis without examining it adequately. The fact that Socrates himself engages in cooperative (rather than eristic) dialectic lends confirmation to this interpretation.

as capable of fathering their own souls. Also, given that the companions wail for themselves when Socrates departs and even liken their position to that of orphans, it is unlikely that *they* are confident in their ability to father their own souls. At the same time, Socrates has successfully combated the companions' psychic ills to some extent. Importantly, none of the companions weep for Socrates, only for themselves (117c). They do not fear that death is a frightful thing for Socrates; they assume that Socrates will fare well in the afterlife (58e-59a). (The exception is Crito, who identifies Socrates with his corpse rather than his immortal soul (115c-e).) Moreover, the companions are no longer in danger of hating argument. In fact, Simmias is the exact opposite of a misologist, when he refuses to blame his mistrust of Socrates' final argument on the argument itself, instead blaming “human weakness” (107a9). Whereas a misologist erroneously blames arguments when an argument appears true at one time and false at another, the lover of inquiry supposes that he himself is “not yet sound” (90e).

Laurel Madison's insightful interpretation of Socrates' last words sheds some light on the question of whether or not Socrates succeeds in bettering the companions' souls.<sup>103</sup> Madison interprets Socrates' last words as both an acknowledgement that the companions' psychic ills have been ameliorated, as well as a commandment that the companions care for their souls. Socrates' last words are as follows:

Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; pay the debt and do not be careless” (118a3-4).  
 ὦ Κρίτων, ἔφη, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρούνα· ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε.

Madison points out that “ἀπόδοτε” and “ἀμελήσητε” occur in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person *plural*. Hence, it is unlikely that Socrates implores Crito (and only Crito) to “pay the debt” and “not be careless.” Rather, contrary to what is standardly assumed, Socrates implores *all* of the companions to pay the debt and not be careless. Also, the fact that the debt is *owed* indicates that the favor has

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<sup>103</sup>Madison 2002.

already been granted, contrary to the standard assumption that the “favor” is Socrates' impending death.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, it is likely that the “favor” is the healing of the companions' souls.

Asclepius is the god of healing, and the primary “healing” with which the dialogue is concerned is the healing of the soul, not the healing of the body. Lastly, “ἀμελήσητε” (“do not be careless”) takes on a double meaning in this context, given that the verb “μελέω” and cognates occur throughout the dialogue in the context of “caring for” one's soul (82d1, 107c3-4, 115b7).

Socrates not only commands the companions to pay their debt to the god of healing; he also orders them to not be careless with their souls. In other words, Socrates both acknowledges that the companions' souls have been partially healed and exhorts the companions to continue the healing process through dedicated soul care. This injunction is exactly what we should expect, if I am right and the dramatic action of the *Phaedo* consists in Socrates' valiant efforts to put the companions on the path to soul care. Thus, discovering the true dramatic structure of the *Phaedo* illuminates Socrates' last words.

In this section I have attempted to establish that the *Phaedo* is a direct, imaginative presentation of characters and their actions, where said actions are of great practical importance to the characters. I now turn to the *Phaedo*'s emotional appeal. The nature of the *Phaedo*'s emotional appeal will not only solidify the dialogue's status as drama, but also reveal Plato's purpose in composing a *dramatic* dialogue. Just as Socrates the “philosopher poet” utilizes myth to train the companions' emotions, Plato utilizes drama to train readers' emotions. In this way, Plato's practice qua author of the *Phaedo* parallels Socrates' own practices.

### III. The Emotional Appeal of the *Phaedo*

The outer frame of the *Phaedo* consists in the dialogue between Echekrates and Phaedo,

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<sup>104</sup>The most prevalent interpretation of Socrates' last words is that Socrates is thanking the god of healing for curing him of the disease of life. This prevalent view can be traced back to Nietzsche (trans. Kaufmann) 1974, 272.



who recounts Socrates' last day with his companions. Socrates' execution and the philosophical discussion which precedes it constitute the inner frame. Like the reader, Echekrates is audience to Socrates' last day; and, as a result, his responses are clues as to how the reader is supposed to respond to the inner frame drama.<sup>105</sup> Strikingly, Echekrates twice refers to a larger audience of which he is part. For instance, when Phaedo declares that nothing brings him greater pleasure than to call Socrates to mind, Echekrates remarks that “your *hearers* [ἀκουσόμενοι] will surely be like you in this” (58d5-8). And again, after Socrates outlines the method of cooperative dialectic or joint inquiry (101c-d), Echekrates exclaims that it is exceedingly clear to the present *hearers* [ἀκούουσιν] (102a8). Who are the other hearers, if not the readers?

A survey of Echekrates' responses reveals that the “audience” is supposed to share some judgments and emotions with the companions, while nevertheless maintaining a degree of psychological distance. So, for example, Echekrates expresses “sympathy” [συγγνώμη] for the depressed companions (88c8).<sup>106</sup> Importantly, Echekrates shares the very same worry as the companions; namely, that no argument for the immortality of the soul can be trusted (88c-d). That the dialogue should have this effect on Echekrates is noteworthy, since, in the *Republic*, tragic drama is said to cause spectators “to sympathize with” [συμπάσχειν] the tragic hero (605d).

To be clear, neither “συγγνώμη” nor “συμπάθεια” correspond to our modern notion of 'empathy.' Empathy requires that one imagine *being* another person, in the sense of experiencing the world “through her eyes.” In contrast, sympathy (συγγνώμη or συμπάθεια) requires a degree

<sup>105</sup>Here I follow the practice of Blank 1993, 437, who looks to Echekrates' responses to determine how Plato intends the reader to respond.

<sup>106</sup>Konstan 2001, 39-41 claims that “συγγνώμη” retains its root meaning in the classic period – i.e., “to understand with” [συν-γινώσκειν]. However, the term is frequently used in legal contexts to denote the “favor” or “pardon” granted by jurors to a defendant presumed to be innocent.

of psychological distance between oneself and the other. In particular, the expression of sympathy for another is attended or constituted by the judgement that the other is *undeserving* of her present misfortune.<sup>107</sup> As such, sympathy is an attitude or emotion expressed “toward” or “for” another, and not just “with” another. Nevertheless, the expression of sympathy for another does require that one experience some of the same types of mental states as the other. In this sense, sympathy is like empathy. However, whereas sympathy requires a partial identification with another person; empathy is a more total identification. So, for example, in sympathizing with the companions, Echekrates expresses distrust of argument, an attitude shared by the companions. Echekrates also shares affective responses and evaluative judgments with the companions – e.g., his enjoying calling Socrates to mind (58d) and his judgment that Socrates has clearly explicated the method of cooperative dialectic (102a). However, Echekrates does not imagine *himself* to be the companions, expressing attitudes, judgments, emotions, etc. from *their point of view*. In other words, Echekrates' distrust of argument, enjoyment of Socrates, praise of Socrates' explication, etc. are *his and his alone* and are experienced as such. Echekrates does not “assimilate” his mind to that of the companions by “taking on” or “simulating” their mental states (as is thought to occur with empathy). In sum, sympathy constitutes a partial identification with another and subsumes a certain favorable attitude “toward” or “for” the other.<sup>108</sup> In contrast,

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107See Konstan 2001, 39-41 regarding συγγνώμη. In the *Republic* Socrates claims that the audience of tragedy sympathizes with [συμπάσχοντες] and feels *pity* for “a man claiming to be good” (605d-606b). Although the verb “συμπάσχειν” was not commonly used in such contexts during the classical period; it later took on a meaning close to the English term “sympathy” and was frequently found in association with pity, an emotion constituted by the judgment that its object is *undeserving* of his misfortune. See Konstan 2001, 49-74, and esp. 58.

108See Halliwell 2002, 72-85 for a discussion of Socrates' understanding of sympathy in the *Republic*. Halliwell also makes the point that, for Plato, sympathy requires a degree of psychological distance on the part of the sympathizer.

empathy is a more complete identification with another and does not necessarily include any attitude toward or for the other.

Therefore, given that our model audience member (i.e., Echekrates) sympathizes with the companions, it is likely that the dialogue is intended to have a similar effect on the larger audience of which Echekrates is part – i.e., the readers. The reader is supposed to share some of the companions' responses, experiencing them as his own. Moreover, the reader is supposed to feel bad *for* the companions – i.e., to feel as though the companions undeservedly suffer a great misfortune. This latter emotion is closely connected with the Greek conception of 'pity' – an emotion constituted by the judgement that the object of pity undeservedly encounters misfortune.<sup>109</sup> And like sympathy, pity is commonly associated with tragic drama (e.g., *Rep* 606b, *Poet* 1449b27-28).

The *Phaedo* most definitely intends to evoke our pity for the companions, especially in its portrayal of the companions as “orphans,” undeserving of their fate.<sup>110</sup> In fact, in the *Apology*, Socrates vehemently disparages defendants in capital punishment cases for using their children – and, in particular, the prospect of their impending orphaning - to arouse pity in jurors (34c-35c). Hence, when the companions lament the loss of their soul father, we are not only supposed to feel sadness “with” the companions in regard to Socrates' death, but also “for” the companions,

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<sup>109</sup>See Konstan 2001, 27-48. According to Konstan, in legal contexts pity involves believing that the accused is “underserving” of punishment in the sense of being *innocent* of the crime. However, in other contexts, notably Greek tragedy, the situation is more complex. In some sense, Ajax is deserving of his fate, to the extent that he brought it on himself, in virtue of his “tragic flaw” [ἀμαρτία] and consequent wrongful actions. However, in another sense, Ajax does not deserve his tragic fate, insofar as no hero deserves disgrace and death. (Such a fate is unfit for so great a personage.)

<sup>110</sup>Here the companions must be “undeserving” in the legal sense – i.e., because they are innocent of any wrongdoing or crime.

who shall be undeservedly orphaned. In other words, we are supposed to feel sympathy and pity for the companions, where pity is a component of sympathy.

This raises a genuine puzzle. If the *Phaedo* is intended to rouse readers' emotions, then why does Socrates actively discourage the expression of emotion? As Nussbaum noted, the wailing Xanthippe is escorted out of the jail cell (60a); and, upon drinking the hemlock, Socrates berates the companions, declaring that “it is mainly for this reason that I sent the women away, to avoid such unseemliness, for I have heard that one should die in good omened silence; so keep quiet and control yourselves” (117d4-e2). The companions immediately feel shame and check their tears. Although Echekrates' reaction is not explicitly noted, we can surmise his response. Insofar as Echekrates responds as the companions do, he would feel a measure of grief.

Is Socrates' reprimand of the companions also intended to apply to the readers? Should we conclude that the *Phaedo* evokes the emotions of its audience only to stifle them? I do not think so. An important interlude between Socrates and the jailor indicates otherwise. The officer says to Socrates, “During the time you have been here I have come to know you in other ways as the noblest, the gentlest and the best man who has ever come here” (116c3-5). The officer weeps and promptly exits the cell, whereupon Socrates remarks, “How pleasant the man is! During the whole time I have been here he has come in and conversed with me from time to time, a most agreeable man. And now how genuinely he weeps for me” (116d3-6). In this instance, Socrates applauds weeping. Why should this be?

The answer must lie in the sharp contrast between the officer's quiet and controlled expression of grief and that of the companions. *Phaedo* describes the companions' response to Socrates drinking the hemlock as follows:

... we could hold them [our tears] back no longer; my own tears came in floods against my will. So I covered my face. I was weeping for myself, not for him – for my misfortune in being deprived of such a comrade. Even before me, Crito was unable to restrain his

tears and got up. Apollodorus had not ceased from weeping before, and at this moment his noisy tears and anger made everybody present break down, except Socrates (117c7-d4).

The companions' grief is uncontrolled and loud, for which reason Socrates orders the companions to keep quiet and control themselves. Most likely, Socrates worries that the companions will make a spectacle of their grief, like the characters of Greek tragic and epic poetry. Indeed, in the *Republic* Socrates warns against excessive, self-gratifying lamentation, on the grounds that it interferes with practical reason (604c) and even habituates the griever to respond to personal misfortune with lamentation rather than practical reason (606b). So, Socrates' admonishments are most likely not intended to silence readers' emotions so much as to shape the manner of their expression.

It is noteworthy that Socrates actually praises the officer for genuinely weeping. This is not so surprising, when we consider that both Socrates and the officer emphasize *the time spent with each other*, as opposed to the terribleness of death. Here, the object of grief is not death per se but rather the loss of a companion of the highest caliber and Socratic dialectic more generally. (Similarly, the companions bewail their own loss of a soul father and Socratic conversations, albeit they express their grief immoderately and self-indulgently.) Thus, Socrates encourages the controlled and quiet emotional expression of the loss of a great comrade and soul nurturer. In addition to feeling sadness *for* the companions on behalf of their loss of a soul father, the reader is supposed to feel a quiet and controlled sadness with regard to the loss of a genuinely good friend of humankind. Because such sadness is constituted by a genuine appreciation of Socrates and his enterprise of soul care and joint inquiry, it serves the pedagogical function of inspiring the reader to follow in Socrates' tracks and pursue wisdom. In this way, Plato's practice as author of the *Phaedo* parallels Socrates' own practice in the *Phaedo*. Both are “philosopher poets,” who freely use dramatic story telling to shape the emotions (and ultimately the *values*) of their

audience.

Thus, the *Phaedo* is a pedagogical drama, which aims to inspire and equip the reader to follow Socrates' tracks. Consideration of the outer frame lends further support to this claim. In the course of the dialogue we enter the outer frame four times. Tellingly, each time Phaedo and Echekrates extoll Socrates and/or Socrates' virtues. In the first frame Echekrates and Phaedo declare that nothing gives them more pleasure than calling Socrates to mind, and Echekrates assures Phaedo that he himself and the reader will feel likewise (58d5-8). In the same breath, Phaedo communicates that Socrates died “nobly and without fear” (58e). In the second frame, which occurs directly after the counter-argument of Simmias and Cebes, Phaedo eulogizes Socrates as pleasant, kind and admiring; Socrates is described as “healing the distress” of the companions by galvanizing them to pursue the argument and to not admit defeat (88e-89a). The passage is not only a ringing endorsement of Socrates the man but also of the Socratic virtues of kindness, resilience and the tenacious pursuit of argument. In the third frame, Echekrates and Phaedo laud Socrates for outlining the method of joint inquiry “extraordinarily clearly” (102a). The virtue of Socrates consists, in part, in his ability and willingness to make his methods and reasoning *clear* [σαφὲς], in sharp contrast to the Pythagorean Philolaus (61e8). The fourth and final instance of the outer frame consists of a single line, uttered by Phaedo in the manner of eulogy: “Such was the end of our comrade, Echekrates, a man who, we should say, was of all those we have known the best, and also the wisest and the most just” (118a15-16). In effect, the outer frame primes the reader to view Socrates as virtuous and the Socratic virtues as the pinnacle of human excellence. The outer frame is the perfect delivery device for this lesson on virtue in that it trains our attention on Socrates and the Socratic virtues and also directs us to discover confirmations of Socrates' virtue in the inner frame dialogue. Hence, it is no surprise that we feel a touch of sadness over the death of Socrates, for the dialogue teaches us to

appreciate Socrates and the Socratic virtues.

## Conclusion

### a. Plato's Practice as Author of Dramatic Dialogues

I have suggested that the dramatic elements of the *Phaedo* ultimately function to shape readers' characters and values. Mightn't Plato's other dramatic dialogues function similarly? Here it is important to remember that Plato was not only a philosopher but also the founder and head of the Academy, a school which produced philosophers and philosopher-statesmen.<sup>111</sup> Plato's dialogues most likely circulated in the Academy, where they would have served a pedagogical function. We know from the *Republic* that Plato puts great emphasis on educating both the intellects and the characters of future philosopher-statesmen. In fact, poetry forms the foundation of this character education. Could it be that the dramatic, poetic elements of the early and middle dialogues were intended to train the characters of Plato's students and would-be students, so as to prepare them for philosophy?

Granted, this is speculative, but it would explain why Plato's late dialogues are significantly less dramatic in nature. These dense and difficult dialogues were probably intended for more advanced students, who would have already possessed the disposition of a philosopher – e.g., loving and pursuing wisdom, caring for one's soul more than one's body, courageously and tenaciously pursuing argument, etc.

Also, Plato may have employed drama so as to draw the reader into the philosophical discourse. Drama tends to elicit participatory responses on the part of the audience.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, the audience of the *Phaedo* (and, in particular, Echekrates) expresses judgments and emotions in line with those of Socrates' actual interlocutors. Supposing that Socrates' remarks on understanding in

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<sup>111</sup>See Guthrie 1970, 23.

<sup>112</sup>See Blank 1993 for a good discussion of the sorts of participatory responses elicited by the dialogues.

the *Phaedrus* reflect Plato's own views, Plato's choice of dramatic dialogues makes perfect sense. Insofar as *dramatic* dialogues invite readers to participate - both affectively and intellectually - in the philosophical back-and-forth, they are exemplars of Socrates' preferred model of speech in the *Phaedrus* – i.e., speech which “sows the seed” of discourse into the reader's soul and begets more discourse and eventually understanding (276e-277a). In other words, one acquires understanding through personal pursuit (i.e., through discourse with others and oneself) rather than through reading journal articles. In the *Phaedo* Socrates puts his position into practice, imploring and equipping the companions (and the reader) to pursue understanding on their own and to not take Socrates' arguments as the final word on the question of the soul's immortality.

#### b. Plato's Views on Poetry

I want to end by suggesting that the *Phaedo*'s status as a “beneficial” or “pedagogical” drama has bearing on how we should understand Plato's criticisms of dramatic poetry in the *Republic*. Does *Republic X* really contain an attack on mimesis and/or poetry *as such*? Or is Plato in the business of reinventing dramatic poetry to suit his own pedagogical purposes? After Socrates completes his critique of Greek tragic and comic drama in the *Republic*, he issues the following caveat:

... if the poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are well aware of the charm it exercises. ... Therefore, isn't it just that such poetry should return from exile when it has successfully defended itself, whether in lyric or any other meter? - Certainly. Then we'll allow it's defenders, who aren't poets themselves but lovers of poetry, to speak in prose on its behalf and to show that it not only gives pleasure but is beneficial to constitutions and to human life. Indeed, we'll listen to them graciously, for we'd certainly profit if poetry were shown to be not only pleasant but also beneficial (607c2-e1).

This is not the only place that Socrates anticipates a form of “beneficial” poetry, aimed at making men better. In both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus* Socrates “speaks in prose” on behalf of



beneficial forms of oratory and rhetoric respectively (*Gorg* 503a-504e; *Phaedr* 269d-278b). Moreover, the *Gorgias* classes poetry as a kind of oratory (503a-504e); and the *Phaedrus* classes poetry as a kind of rhetoric (258b3, 277e8-9, 278c). In other words, in all three dialogues Plato acknowledges the possibility of reformed poetry, aimed at making men better. Perhaps the *Phaedo* is Plato's exemplar of reformed poetry, as is hinted by Socrates' preoccupation with poetry throughout the dialogue.

In any case, for those who see Book X as containing a *metaphysical* attack on poetry,<sup>113</sup> the poetic nature of Plato's dramatic dialogues can only be emblematic of Plato's failure to put his own philosophical convictions into practice and extinguish his “childish passion for poetry which the majority of people have” (*Rep* 608a3-4).

Rather than attribute such a grave failure to Plato, we should reexamine the arguments of Book X. To suppose that Book X attacks images or even mimesis as such ignores many key features of the dialectic – for example, the definition of the mimetikos as one who, in virtue of his ignorance, imitates that which *appears* fine to the ignorant (598b, 600e, 602a); the suggestion that the mimetikos imitates and reproduces *illusions* (602c-605c); and the complete absence in Book X of the term used for “image” (i.e., “εἰκόν”) in the divided line passage (509d-511e). In other words, it seems that Book X operates with very particular conceptions of 'mimesis' and 'image.' It is entirely possible that Book X targets an “art of imitation,” concerned solely with imitating and reproducing the axiological *illusions* to which the ignorant majority are subject. Indeed, Socrates' frequent use of the terms denoting an “art” of imitation (i.e., *mimētika*,

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113The supposed “metaphysical charge” is that poetry is an image of an image of the Forms and so is “far removed” from truth. Plato's supposed metaphysical charge against poetry is not only a common fixture in philosophy classes and even philosophy podcasts (e.g., “Poetry as a Way of Knowing,” *Philosophy Talk*, 04/06/2012); it also dominates a lot of the scholarship on *Republic* X. See, for example, Annas 1982; Moss 2007; and Gould 1996.

mimetikos), as well as his emphasis on illusion, certainly indicate this.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, the evidence that Socrates and Plato are supporters and even producers of reformed poetry calls into question the standard line that Plato is hostile toward poetry. Once again, attention to the literary aspects of Plato's dialogues has great potential to enrich our understanding of their philosophical content.

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<sup>114</sup>Belfiore 1984 is the originator of the view that *Republic X* targets the mimetikos (i.e., the practitioner of the art of imitation) rather than mimesis per se.

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## CHAPTER 4

# Plato and Movie Violence: A Theory of Audience Response

Admittedly, Plato remained silent on the topic of movie violence. Nonetheless, he had quite a lot to say about the popular entertainment of his day, especially tragic drama. In *Republic* X Plato argues that tragedy's portrayals of lamentation and dirges corrupt adult audiences by causing them to think, feel and behave unhealthily. Today, similar claims are routinely made with regard to movie violence. Many maintain that violent films cause viewers to think, feel and/or behave violently or aggressively.<sup>115</sup> Critics counter that violent films only affect violent or aggressive viewers, whose violent predispositions – and not violent films - are ultimately responsible for any increase in their violent thoughts, feelings and/or behaviors.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, both academic and public debates about movie violence are highly polarized, with one side blaming violent movies and the other side blaming viewers' predispositions for increases in viewer violence or aggression.<sup>117</sup> What is missing from these debates is a sensible version of the third alternative; namely, the view that violent media and maladaptive predispositions *together cause* increases in viewer violence or aggression. In what follows, I suggest that Plato provides a plausible version of this third alternative in his model of how tragic drama affects adult audiences.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Heusmann & Tylor 2006; Bushman & Huesmann 2006; Anderson et al. 2003; Bushman & Anderson 2001.

<sup>116</sup>Grimes, Anderson & Bergen 2008.

<sup>117</sup>This public debate has recently played out with regard to James Holmes, the University of Colorado graduate student who, claiming to be the “Joker,” committed a mass murder at a premiere of the latest Batman movie.

I have two aims in this chapter - one historical or interpretive and one philosophical. First, I aim to clarify Plato's theory of audience response and to resolve some of the interpretive problems and ambiguities surrounding Plato's theory of audience response. Second, in applying Plato's model to films, I aim to demonstrate the philosophical plausibility of Plato's model, in addition to its implications for media violence debates and theories of audience response more generally.

This study proceeds in stages. First, I begin with some preliminary remarks about Greek theater. Next, I outline Plato's model of audience response, concluding that Plato's model is transferrable to fictional film, despite differences between Greek drama and fictional film. I then defend the plausibility of Plato's model, as applied to certain sorts of violent film. In the final section I argue that Plato is right to assume that audiences genuinely believe – rather than “imagine” or “pretend believe” - moral and normative contents in the theater, contra popular pretense theories of audience response.

### I. Greek Theater

I do not deny that Ancient Greek drama was markedly different from modern-day movies. To begin with, Athenian theater was a publicly funded institution. Anywhere from 14-17,000 men<sup>119</sup> crowded onto the marble seats of the theater of Dionysus as part of the “Great Dionysia,” an annual festival featuring religious and civic ceremonies intended to honor Dionysus, foster solidarity, ignite patriotism, and showcase the imperial power of Athens. Several playwrights were specially selected to put on plays at the Great Dionysia, where a panel of judges would

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<sup>118</sup>I am not the first to suggest that Plato's critique might hit a modern target. See, for example, Burnyeat 1999, 249-255 and Nehamas 1988.

<sup>119</sup>See Goldhill 1997, 56-66 for a summary of debates about whether women and/or children were permitted at Greek tragedies. There is general agreement that some foreigners attended.

pronounce one comic poet and one tragic poet the victors. The mass audience made its favorites known, via whistling, catcalls, applause, seat banging, and the like. The judge paid heed to majority opinion, else he be tried in court for “favoritism” in the days following the festival.<sup>120</sup> Hence, not unlike modern day sporting events or political rallies, the Greek theater was fraught with competition and emotion.

Not only the social context, but also the form and content of Greek drama differed from that of film. All song and speech followed metrical patterns, which served to control mood and emotion.<sup>121</sup> By the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century Greek tragedy typically employed three actors and a chorus; the chorus sang and danced, exchanged dialogue with the protagonist and provided emotionally wrought (and often probing) commentaries on plot and characters. The protagonist typically embodied a Greek hero – i.e., a personage of divine and/or royal blood, familiar from Greek myths and epic poetry. Usually, the tragic hero underwent a reversal of fortune, at which point he was reduced from grandeur to misery as a result of his own actions and divine influences.

Importantly, the poet was regarded as a “sophos,” a wise authority on human affairs.<sup>122</sup> In the *Republic* Socrates refers to Homer as the presumed “educator of Greece” (606e2); and the *Protagoras* portrays poetry as an integral part of Greek moral education (326a). Beginning in the 4<sup>th</sup> century tragic poetry was performed at symposia, as well as privately read and studied. Put simply, poetry permeated Greek society.

In sum, Greek tragic drama possessed several features which distinguish it from movies:

- (3) The normative content of poetry was, to a large extent, endorsed by the culture (as evidenced by the role of poetry in key Greek institutions).

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120Flickinger 1936, 215-216.

121Easterling1997, 156-61.

122Whether the poets conceived of *themselves* as sophoi is another matter entirely. See Heath 1987, 38-47.

- (4) The emotional power of performed poetry was amplified by a mass audience.
- (5) The performance of Greek tragedy occurred within a competitive context.
- (6) Audiences harbored preexisting favorable attitudes toward poetry protagonists, who embodied familiar Greek heroes.
- (7) Meter and the chorus shaped Greek viewers' engagement with Greek drama.

To be sure, none of the above features are essential or ubiquitous aspects of modern movies.

Nevertheless, as will become clear, Plato's *Republic* Book X model of how Greek drama affects audiences is strikingly general in that it does not depend on the unique social context or stylistic features of Greek poetry.

## II. The Danger of Drama: The Platonic Model

*Sorrow fell on Achilles like a cloud. He swept up the dust with both hands, and poured it over his head and smirched his handsome face, till the black dirt stained his fragrant tunic. He tore his hair and fell flat in the dust, grand in his grandeur. ... Antilochus had taken the hands of Achilles and stood weeping beside him, while he moaned heavily; for he feared Achilles might put the steel to his own throat (Iliad 18.22-34).*

*As he [Achilles] remembered these [adventures with Patroclus] he shed hot tears, now tossing on his side, now on his back, now prone; again he would rise up and roam distracted alone the seashore. Never did he fail to see the dawn appear over sea and shore; and then he would harness the horses and fasten Hector to drag behind the car (Iliad 24.1-18).<sup>123</sup>*

In the *Republic* Socrates objects to these poetic depictions of the hero Achilles madly grieving the loss of his beloved, Patroclus, whom Hector slew (388a). Such portrayals, claims Socrates, are the centerpiece of Greek tragedy, which is populated by figures who gouge their own eyes out and kill their own children in fits of fiery emotion.

It is important to note that Plato targets *self-indulgent* and *unreasonably excessive* expressions of grief, which express false beliefs about what is good and bad in human life. In particular, Plato opposes expressions of grief which (1) gratify the griever (606a-b), (2) interfere with practical reason (604c) and (3) express the belief that the loss of external goods is hugely

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<sup>123</sup>Rouse 1999 translation of Homer's *Iliad*.



terrible (387d-e, 603e-604b<sup>124</sup>). Such histrionics threaten both the Greek ethos of resilience and manliness and the Socratic ethos of practical rationality and soul health.

Thus, Socrates focuses his attack on expressions of grief in the *Iliad*, which possess features 1-3. First, the characters of the *Iliad* take pleasure in lamentation (e.g., 23.1-24, 23.98, 24.704-800), which was probably not uncommon, as evidenced by the fact that Socrates classifies lamentation as a “mixed pleasure” in the *Philebus* (48a). Second, Achilles' excessive, self-indulgent grief handicaps his practical reason; he behaves vengefully, sacrilegiously, petulantly and (in general) unreasonably in the wake of his grief. Third, as Socrates points out, Achilles' lamentation expresses the false belief that death or personal loss is a terrible [δεινόν] thing for a decent man to suffer (387d-e).<sup>125</sup> According to Socrates, only *having a bad soul* is truly terrible for a human being. Thus, the decent man is “most self-sufficient in living well,” having the least need of anyone or anything external to himself (387d11). Personal and material attachments are largely insignificant in comparison to “virtue” or “excellence” [ἀρετή], which Socrates analyzes as soul health, an internal good. Hence, to bewail personal loss is to express the false belief that possessions, friends or embodied existence is supremely valuable. Soul health is supremely valuable, and the goodness of external things is largely (though perhaps not entirely) contingent upon whether or not they facilitate soul health.<sup>126</sup> So, according to Socrates, the heroes of poetry, in lamenting the loss of external goods, express the *wrong values*.

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124As I have argued in chapter 1, lamentation is the expression of the belief (issuing from improperly trained spirit) that personal loss is terrible.

125See Konstan 2001, 1-27 for the view that the Greeks emphasized the role of judgment in the emotions.

126Whereas in other works Plato puts forth a “Dependency Thesis” regarding external goods (i.e., the goodness of external goods is wholly dependent on whether or not their possessor is virtuous); in the *Republic* Socrates seems to allow that external goods are of some limited intrinsic value. For a good discussion of this topic see Bobonich 2004, 179-209.

In sum, Socrates is not concerned with the mere shedding of tears but rather self-indulgent, excessive lamentation, which impairs practical reasoning and expresses the wrong values.<sup>127</sup> To dismiss Plato's Book X argument as relying on “a puritanical prescription about which psychological reactions and modes of behavior one should approve in oneself” misses the point.<sup>128</sup> Plato is not drawing a false dichotomy between reason and emotion and vilifying emotion. Rather, Plato actually has very good reasons for targeting tragic depictions of lamentation and dirges – reasons which rest on his philosophical vision of human value and human virtue.

We are now in a position to appreciate why the appearance Socrates most associates with tragedy - i.e., the appearance that a fine man suffers a terrible misfortune - is an *illusion*. According to Socrates, only having a bad soul is truly terrible for a human being. Moreover, fine individuals – especially gods and heroes - are not histrionic, irascible, multicolored, etc. They are reasonable and rational – in short, the antithesis of Homer's Achilles. In contrast to Achilles, an excellent human being operates with an accurate conception of what is valuable in human life, reasoning with a view to its attainment. Because the virtuous individual prizes internal goods (i.e., goods of soul) over external goods, the loss of external goods neither excites nor angers him. In addition, because his desires track whatever reason deems beneficial, his appetites are few and simple. Hence, the truly excellent human being is neither multicolored nor variable, but “remains pretty well the same” (604e1), unperturbed by violent appetites or emotions and pursuing a unified vision of what is valuable in life.<sup>129</sup>

127Recall, in the *Phaedo* Socrates actually praises the jailor for genuinely weeping for him. See chapter 3, 25-26.

128Janaway 1995, 155. Cf. Halliwell 1988, esp. 132 and Murray 1997, 227.

129Socrates associates complexity and variability with the democratic character, who is “full of all sorts of characters” and “contains the most models of constitutions and ways of living” (561e). However, Achilles, who is primarily driven by honor, does not conform to Socrates' description of the democratic character. Socrates

In a certain sense, Socrates' critique of excessive, self-indulgent lamentation is compelling, especially when placed in its historical context. To flourish amid social and political upheaval, war and plague would have required resilience. Even in our own time, the histrionic individual is not normally esteemed, but disparaged as a “drama queen.” Someone who indulges in emotion for its own sake (i.e., for the pleasant sensations emotion produces) is inauthentic and hedonistic. That said, Socrates' remark that “human affairs aren't worth taking very seriously” (604b11) and consequent devaluation of “external goods” like friends, family and embodied existence represent a radical position - one which I do not defend. Nor do I defend the corollary of this position; namely, that remaining relatively unattached to friends, family and embodied existence (as Socrates does in the *Phaedo*) is emblematic of human excellence.

In any case, it is not my aim to defend Plato's critique *as applied to tragedy*. Rather, my aim is to defend the plausibility of Plato's audience psychology; in particular, his general model of how popular drama corrupts audiences, irrespective of any Platonic commitments to particular virtues or particular values. So, with that end in mind, I propose to revisit some of the questions I broached earlier, in chapter 1.

According to Socrates, the irrational part of the soul *believes* tragedy's dominant axiological illusion (i.e., that a fine man suffers a terrible misfortune), because it believes whatever appears to it in virtue of its nature. However, why suppose that the irrational part of the soul believes whatever appears to it? For instance, why suppose that my perceiving an optical illusions entails my believing said illusion (in some part of myself)? Similarly, why suppose that describes the democrat as putting all of his pleasures on equal footing and “yielding day by day to the desire at hand,” with the result that “there's neither order nor necessity in his life” (561c5-d4). In other words, the democratic life lacks a principle of organization – i.e., values around which actions and projects are organized. Insofar as Achilles values honor and does what he does for its sake, his life does have a principle of organization and a certain order.

my perceiving tragedy's axiological illusions entails my believing them (in some part of myself)?

However, it is plausible that we do experience belief (or something *like* belief) in connection with visual illusions. Consider the glass walkway installed 4,000 feet above the floor of the Grand Canyon. The “Grand Canyon Skywalk” produces the visual illusion that one is stepping off of a cliff. Tourists who traverse the Skywalk experience vertigo, trepidation and hesitation, despite simultaneously believing that they are stepping onto a perfectly safe, glass deck. In an influential article, Tamar Gendler argues that this familiar psychological phenomenon points to the existence of an arational and primitive part of ourselves – a part which undergoes “belief-like states” (i.e., “aliefs”) in connection with appearances or perceptions.<sup>130</sup> Aliefs are “belief-like” to the extent that they function like beliefs in their connection to desires, emotions and behaviors.

However, Socrates' claim that the irrational part believes that which appears to it is importantly different from Gendler's claim that the arational part experiences belief-like states in connection with appearances. In the *Republic* Socrates is not claiming that the perceptions of the irrational part *function as* beliefs (and so are “belief-like”), but rather that the irrational part *believes whatever it perceives*; its perceiving is a kind of believing (602e, 605c1-3).<sup>131</sup>

Nevertheless, in the *Timaeus* – a later dialogue continuous with the *Republic*<sup>132</sup> - Socrates'

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130In Tamar Gendler 2008, 634-663 these belief-like states are called “aliefs,” because they are *associative*, often *action-generating* and *affect-laden*, *arational*, *automatic*, *agnostic* with respect to their content, shared with *animals*, and conceptually and developmentally *antecedent* to other cognitive attitudes (641).

131See Burnyeat 1997, 228 and Halliwell 1988, 134. Burnyeat is optimistic about the possibility of perception constituting a kind of believing. However, Halliwell points out that Socrates has not argued that perception amounts to belief in the relevant cases.

132There are dramatic and content continuities between the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. The *Timaeus* is set the day after the *Republic*. Also, the *Timaeus* invokes the tripartite theory of the soul, which is remarkably similar to that

account of the irrational, appetitive part of the soul is closer to Gendler's view. In the *Timaeus* Socrates denies that the irrational, appetitive part possesses beliefs [δόξα] (77b3-6); however, Socrates attributes to appetite a mode of perception that directly influences desires, emotions and behaviors (69d4-6, 71a-e). These states are like belief in that they have representational content and give rise to desires, emotions and behaviors.<sup>133</sup>

In light of the fact that the *Republic* attributes beliefs to appetite, it is likely that the *Timaeus* represents a change in position – one which reflects Plato's evolving conception of belief from something perception-like to something requiring the operation of reason.<sup>134</sup> In any case, whether or not Plato erroneously conflates belief and perception in the *Republic*, Plato's audience psychology does not *require* this philosophical commitment. Rather, as we shall see, Plato's audience psychology depends on the existence of an arational part of the soul whose perceptions (both optical and axiological) directly give rise to desires, emotions and behaviors. (However, in keeping with the terminology of *Republic X*, I will refer to the “beliefs” and “judgments” of the irrational part of the soul.<sup>135</sup>)

In many cases we do not act on our irrational perceptions or beliefs, despite their influence on our desires, emotions and behaviors. Just as the Grand Canyon sky walker dismisses her trepidation and her aversion to stepping out onto the glass, acting on her rational conviction that the Skywalk is safe (despite her irrational perception to the contrary); the bereaved man (if

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of the *Republic*. See Lorenz 2006, 74-75.

133The *Philebus* presents a much clearer picture of how this works. See especially 32b-40c. See Lorenz 2006, 93-110.

134And indeed, Plato's view of belief changes considerably between the *Republic* and the *Theaetetus*. See Lorenz 2006, 74-94 for the view that in the *Theaetetus* belief formation requires reason, in contrast to the *Republic*.

135As I have suggested in chapter 1 (in connection with appetitive beliefs), belief and perception are indistinguishable in the *Republic*; both are faculties set over sensibles.

he is decent) normally dismisses his grief and his desire to lament, acting on his rational conviction that his loss is “not all that bad” in the grand scheme of things (despite his irrational perception to the contrary). However, in the theater the decent man relaxes his reason, so that he may experience the pleasure of freely weeping for the hero, unfettered by the rational realization that the hero ought not to lament (606a-b). Also, the theatergoer discerns no danger and no shame in lamenting *for another man*. Due to these factors, the decent theatergoer accepts what appears to his irrational part (i.e., that a fine man suffers a terrible, lamentation-worthy fate), with the result that he laments for the tragic hero. The following passage illustrates what is involved in lamenting for the tragic hero:

When even the best of us hear Homer or some other tragedian imitating one of the heroes sorrowing and making a long lamenting speech or singing and beating his breast, you know that we enjoy it, give ourselves up to following it [ἐνδόντες ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐπόμεθα], sympathize [συμπάσχοντες] with the hero, take his sufferings seriously [σπουδάζοντες], and praise as a good poet the one who affects us most in this way (605c9-d3).<sup>136</sup>

The verb I have translated as “sympathizing” [συμπάσχοντες] requires some care. It was not widely used in such contexts in the classical period, and only later did it become commonly associated with pity and mean something close to the English word “sympathy.” The verb literally means “to be affected in common with,” and in the *Charmides* Socrates employs it in its literal sense:

Now when Critias heard this and saw me in a difficulty, he seemed to me - just as the sight of someone yawning opposite causes people to be affected in the same way [συμπάσχουσιν] - to be compelled by the sense of my difficulty to be caught in a difficulty himself (169c3-6, Sprague translation).

Here, “to sympathize” with another person involves sharing outward or inner responses with that person. Crucially, it does not require that one simulate another person's mind (as is thought to occur with empathy). The yawns of the sympathetic yawners are their own and are experienced

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<sup>136</sup>Throughout I use the Grube and Reeve 1992 translation of the *Republic*

as such. Likewise, Critias does not experience the difficulty by assimilating himself to Socrates and experiencing the difficulty “through Socrates' eyes;” rather, Critias experiences the difficulty as himself, through his own eyes.

As it is used in *Republic X*, συμπάσχειν involves the sharing of both an inner, cognitive response and an outer, physical response. The audience member weeps with the hero and so is outwardly “affected in common with” the hero.<sup>137</sup> Also, he is inwardly affected in common with the hero, in that he “takes seriously” the sufferings of the hero. Put another way, an audience member's outward tears are neither pretense nor play but express a serious, “inner stance” toward the hero's misfortune.<sup>138</sup> This is no surprise, since, as we have seen, Greek audiences genuinely believe (in virtue of their irrational part) that a fine man, the tragic hero, suffers a terrible fate.

For Socrates, sharing an “inner stance” with the tragic hero is not equivalent to empathizing or identifying with the hero, in the strong sense of taking on the hero's perspective and seeing the misfortune through his eyes. Importantly, Socrates describes the audience's emotional response as issuing from the “pitying part” [τὸ ἐλεινόν] of the soul. Pity is emotion expressed *about a person in relation to his misfortune*, rather than an emotional response to the misfortune itself. It has as its object the individual for whom one feels pity. For the Greeks especially, who lack the notion of 'self-pity,' pity is an emotion expressed for another and not oneself.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, in pitying the tragic hero, the audience member is not simulating the hero's

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<sup>137</sup>This can be deduced from the fact that tragedy gratifies the audience member's desire to weep and wail, inducing her to “follow” the wailing hero. See *Ion* 535e and *Philebus* 48a for the claim that poetry often brings its audience to tears.

<sup>138</sup>Even the sympathetic yawner does not pretend yawn. To be affected in common with someone is to be genuinely affected in common with them, both inside and out.

<sup>139</sup>In attic Greek there exists no special word for 'self-pity,' and the Greek verbs for pitying (οἰκτεῖρειν, ἐλεεῖν) are very rarely used reflexively, and only in exceptional cases. See Konstan 2001, 64-71. So, according to Aristotle,

mental state (for instance, his self-pity); the audience member's pity is not also an instance of empathy. Moreover, whereas empathizing with the tragic hero would require one to bewail the hero's misfortune as though one were oneself the tragic hero, pitying the tragic hero requires only that one weep *for* the tragic hero *on behalf of* his plight. Weeping for the hero does not involve momentarily assuming the identity of the hero; rather, it involves sharing a particular inner stance with the hero (i.e., the perception or belief that the present misfortune is terrible) in a way which reflects one's separateness from the hero. So, whereas the hero perceives the misfortune as “terrible for *me*,” the audience member perceives the misfortune as “terrible for *someone else*.”

Quite possibly, the audience member's perception of the terribleness of the hero's misfortune arises from imagining *himself* to be in a similar situation. Certainly, Socrates' audience psychology does not rule this out. However, imagining oneself to be in a similar situation is not necessarily equivalent to experiencing the hero's misfortune “as he experiences it,” but rather as *oneself* would experience, were one in a similar situation.

Nevertheless, Socrates' audience psychology does rule out an “identification” or “empathy” view of audience response, according to which an audience member *identifies* with the tragic hero in the strong sense of experiencing the hero's misfortune “as he experiences it” or “through his eyes” – i.e., as though one were oneself the tragic hero. For Socrates, audience members retain a degree of psychological distance from the hero.<sup>140</sup> To see this, consider that in Book III Socrates endorses an identification model, but only with regard to performers or reciters of poetry. Performers are said to “imitate” poetry characters in the strong sense of “likening” [ὁμοιοῦν] their bodies, voices and *minds* to the characters (393c5-6, 395d1, 396d4); they

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we do not pity those whom we are closely related to, because in such cases “we feel about them as if we were in danger ourselves” (*Rhetoric* 1386a19).

<sup>140</sup>Halliwell 2002, 72-85.



“mould” [ἐκμάττειν] themselves on the model of another character (396d7). According to Socrates, this self-likening is so total that eventually performers become what they repeatedly imitate or impersonate in this way (395c-d). Notably, Socrates does not employ the language of self-likening or imitation in connection with audience members, who are “affected in common” with the hero in a more limited sense. Unlike the actor, the audience member attends to the fact that *these are the sufferings of another*, and is able (in virtue of this psychological distance) to pity the tragic hero.

Lastly, as I have argued, Socrates' critique of Greek drama crucially relies on the idea that audience members exercise their own perspectives (i.e., that of their irrational part) in lamenting for the hero. This rules out identification and contagion views of audience response, according to which the viewer assumes the alien perspective of the tragic hero (identification) or else “catches” weeping and wailing from the tragic hero (contagion).

Socrates next explains the danger involved in sympathizing with and pitying the tragic hero:

I suppose that few are able figure out that enjoyment of other people's sufferings is necessarily transferred to our own and that the pitying part, if it is nourished and strengthened on the sufferings of others, won't be easily held in check when we ourselves suffer (606b5-8).

λογίζεσθαι γὰρ οἶμαι ὀλίγοις τισὶν μέτεστιν ὅτι ἀπολαύειν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων εἰς τὰ οἰκεῖα· θρέψαντα γὰρ ἐν ἐκείνοις ἰσχυρὸν τὸ ἐλείνὸν οὐ ῥάδιον ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῦ πάθεσι κατέχειν.

The “pitying part” is none other than the irrational part of the soul, which is the source of the decent man's disposition to view his own misfortunes as terrible and to desire to lament in response. Plato's point is that this disposition is both *self* and *other* regarding. So, if it is strengthened with regard to others, then it is strengthened with regard to oneself. This is because weeping for the hero (on behalf of his misfortune) and bewailing one's own misfortunes both involve (a) the viewpoint that personal misfortune is terrible and (b) the satisfaction of the desire

to lament in response. To succumb to this viewpoint and its concomitant appetitive desire is to strengthen both the viewpoint and the desire, whether or not the misfortune is one's own or another's.

There are two primary ways in which tragedy “strengthens” the viewpoint and desire of the irrational part. First, tragedy strengthens the *motivational force* of the viewpoint and the desire; which is to say, tragic drama strengthens the decent man's tendency to *succumb to* his irrational viewpoint and desire. This occurs because the pleasure of succumbing to his irrational viewpoint and desire in the theater (with regard to the hero's misfortunes) conditions the decent man to succumb to his irrational viewpoint and desire in real life (with regard to his own misfortunes). Second, tragedy strengthens the *perceptual force* of the irrational viewpoint; which is to say, the frequency with which the agent applies his lamentation-supporting viewpoint to situations. So, according to Socrates, poetry's depictions of heroes lamenting cause young people to “groan and lament at even insignificant misfortunes” (388d7). The worry is that repeated exposure to tragedies trains Greeks to apply the lamentation-supporting perspective to formerly ambiguous stimuli (e.g., the loss of a half drachma).<sup>141</sup>

Before I discuss the plausibility of Plato's audience psychology (as applied to modern audiences), I would like to highlight the *generality* of Plato's model. Aside from an appeal to tragic content, it does not rely on any of the peculiar features of Greek tragic drama already noted; namely, its institutionalization, its cast of familiar heroes, its competitive dimension,

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<sup>141</sup>Although this point is made with regard to adolescents, I see no reason why it would not carry over to adults. In

any case, while Socrates is quite explicit that exposure to tragedy strengthens the motivational force of the irrational perspective, he is not as explicit as regards the strengthening of the perceptual force of the irrational perspective. Also, it is not clear *how* the perceptual force of the lamentation-supporting perspective is strengthened. Are we more likely to apply this perspective because it is pleasurable to do so, because we have practice in doing so and/or because we are primed to do so? What are the mechanisms?

its mass audience or its use of meter and chorus.

Importantly, Book X makes no appeal to the institutionalization of Greek poetry, allegiances to certain poets or preexisting favorable attitudes toward Greek heroes to explain how tragedy corrupts the decent man. That said, culture plays a pivotal role in Plato's audience psychology, since culture shapes the irrational part of the soul, which tragedy appeals to. However, as I have said, tragedy strengthens a part of the soul that *has already* been moulded by social and cultural forces, including Greek poetry. Thus, while I do not deny that the cultural function of popular contemporary film differs markedly from that of popular Greek poetry, this fact makes little difference to the audience psychology of *Republic X*, which is primarily concerned with how popular drama *strengthens* – not forms – aspects of the psyche which have already been formed by culture, experience and nature. That said, Plato's point about culture resonates in our own time. Popular films very often reflect cultural ideals of beauty, coolness, nobility, value, etc. In so doing, they appeal to a part of the psyche that unreflectively accepts cultural images of what is good and bad. However, because popular film is not part of our education system, it may not exercise the same degree of influence in creating and upholding cultural ideals of excellence and value (though this is debatable).

Furthermore, stylistic differences between film and Greek drama present no difficulty in drawing the comparison between popular Greek poetry and popular contemporary film. Although it is possible that Plato acknowledges a role for music and meter in contributing to tragedy's axiological illusions (e.g., to the illusory fineness of the hero or the illusory correctness of his behavior),<sup>142</sup> film techniques such as editing and music serve a similar function, as we shall see.

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<sup>142</sup>See, for example, 398d-401b, wherein Socrates says that musical mode and meter must “follow” or “conform to” the speaker's words, which in turn must conform to the character of the speaker's soul. Cf. *Laws* 669c. However, Plato does not explicitly acknowledge the possibility of a poet fostering the axiological illusion that a vicious

Lastly, mass psychology plays no role in Plato's audience psychology; Socrates gives no indication that audience members “catch” emotions from the crowd.

It is important to keep in mind that Plato does not purport to develop a comprehensive model of audience response to drama. In Book X Socrates focuses exclusively on how audience members respond to one aspect of tragic drama (i.e., the tragic lament), in order to show how tragedy corrupts the psyche. Thus, it is not obvious that Plato's model rules out emotional contagion or empathy as modes of engaging with other aspects of Greek drama. (In fact, in the *Ion* Socrates arguably flirts with these views.<sup>143</sup>) Rather, Plato demonstrates how one mode of audience response corrupts audiences. Thus, my practice in the next section will be the same, only with regard to certain sorts of violent films. By attending to *one way* in which we emotionally engage with films, I shall contend that certain sorts of violent films may strengthen viewers' violent predispositions in the same way that tragic drama purportedly strengthens viewers' histrionic dispositions.

### III. The Menace of Movies: The Platonic Model

Plato's model of how fictional media corrupt audiences differs considerably from models

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character is fine by pairing musical modes and meter that imitate a fine character with the depiction of a vicious character. Rather, he thinks that the poet deceives foolish people into thinking that he speaks “extremely well” about virtue by employing appealing musical modes and rhythms (601a). So, it may be that the pleasing musicality of the poem lends force to its axiological illusions; specifically, its illusion that its images of vice are images of virtue.

<sup>143</sup>See *Ion* 533d-536d. According to Lear 2011, 208 and Burnyeat 1999, 265-266 the *Ion* represents a bystander theory of audience response; the audience member adopts the perspective of a “witness” to ancient events. This is not so obvious. At 535d the rhapsode is said to affect the audience *in the same way that he is affected*. If the rhapsode impersonates various characters (e.g., Andromache, Hecuba, Priam, etc.), then it is possible that the audience does too. Socrates is not very clear on this.

proposed by prominent media violence scholars. Whereas most media violence scholars maintain that the mere *depiction* of violence corrupts audiences, on Plato's model axiological illusions surrounding violence corrupt audiences. Importantly, such illusions are neither “contained” in the film nor imposed on the film by the viewer; rather, they are the joint product of the film and the viewer's arational part - i.e., that part of the human psyche to which the pleasant appears choice-worthy and the socially esteemed appears noble.<sup>144</sup> After applying Plato's model to a certain sort of violent film, I will argue that Plato's model of how violent films affect audiences provides a plausible third alternative to those currently on offer.

a. Applying Plato's Model: *Natural Born Killers*

What sort of film interacts with the irrational part to produce axiological illusions surrounding violence? Consider Oliver Stone's film *Natural Born Killers*, wherein two protagonists, Mickey and Mallory, go on a mass killing spree. Mickey and Mallory relish the murdering, which serves to stoke their passion for each other. Meanwhile, television journalist Wayne Gale sensationalizes Mickey and Mallory's crimes, with the result that the couple become cult heroes, revered around the world. The film opens with a scene of murder and mayhem. After two diner patrons offend Mickey and Mallory, the pair indiscriminately stab, shoot and dismember the patrons. The violence is not realistic. A bullet lingers for a moment before it explodes in the chef's head. A knife flies through a glass window and stabs a man in the back. According to Stone, this scene (and others) make an exaggerated *spectacle* of violence in order to satirize the media's sensationalization and glorification of violence.<sup>145</sup> However, the film arguably exemplifies what it purports to satirize. As one film text book puts it:

Mickey and Mallory are the most attractive characters in the film ... and the couple's victims are unpleasant and repulsive, which makes it easier for the viewer to

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<sup>144</sup>See chapter 1.

<sup>145</sup>See the director's commentary of *Natural Born Killers: Director's Cut* (1994).

applaud their murder and enjoy the spectacle of slaughter. Stone intercuts color and black-and-white 35-mm footage with 16- and 8-mm film footage and video footage. He intercuts live action and cartoon images, and uses jump cuts and camera angles that lurch in a crazy, off-kilter fashion. This unusual style helps to make the violence hypnotic and fascinating. It become spectacle. The imagery is so aggressive and intense that it arguably overwhelms the clear point of view that Stone described as his goal for the film.<sup>146</sup>

Also, the film frequently intercuts images of violence in nature, which serve to lend force to Mickie's pronouncements that:

It's just murder, man. All of God's creatures do it, some form or another. I mean, you look in the forest. You got species killing other species. Our species is killin' all the species includin' the forest, and we just call it "industry," not murder. ... The wolf don't know why he's a wolf, the deer don't know why he's a deer. God just made it that way.

However, in the end Mickie and Mallory transcend the violence. Referring to his love of Mallory, Mickie exclaims, "Only love can kill the demon." Stone claims that the central theme of the film is that "violence is all around us; it's in nature and it's in every one of us, and we have to acknowledge it and come to grips with it."<sup>147</sup> And indeed, the film portrays some less than ideal consequences of the murdering spree, as well as the childhood trauma that preceded it. For example, Mickie, awaking from a dream about being beaten as a young boy, accidentally shoots and kills the Native American man who rescued him and Mallory. On the other hand, the fact that Mickie and Mallory so easily transcend their violent past - going on to lead a relatively normal family life, despite having savagely slaughtered 50+ people – certainly trivializes the violence.

In any case, for Plato, the "stance" that the film as a whole takes on violence is largely immaterial. To see this, consider that Socrates never discusses a poem's ultimate "stance" on histrionics or lamentation. This is likely intentional, rather than an oversight. Tragic drama is thought to corrupt audiences by engaging their non-rational parts, which do not critically assess

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<sup>146</sup>Prince 2007, 428-9.

<sup>147</sup>Silet (ed.) 2001, 156.

the deeper meaning of the drama as a whole, but rather blindly accept whatever they “see” in particular scenes. Thus, even supposing that films like *Natural Born Killers* enable viewers to recognize their own animalistic attraction to violence, they do so at a cost - one which Stone overlooks.

Indeed, Plato would identify a real danger in films like *Natural Born Killers*. As we saw in chapter 1, spirit – as the source of a person's anger and desire for social status – can become irascible and violent, if improperly nurtured. The desire for a high place in the social order can easily - if improperly nurtured - evolve into a desire to dominate others through violence. Thus, the educational program of *Republic* II-III is specifically aimed at training the spirited part of guardians to pursue warranted (rather than wanton) violence – i.e., violence in the name of protecting the city and its inhabitants. In other words, the seed of violence is in each of us (or at least most of us), if something like Plato's tripartite theory of the soul is right. This is not to say that each and every one of us has an established proclivity for violence; rather, each and every one of us can *develop* this proclivity. However, even though Stone sympathizes with this view of human nature, he nevertheless fails to appreciate what so many people find unsettling about his film; namely, that it nurtures this seed of violence in viewers.

There is an important caveat. As with tragedy, the viewer's “seed of violence” must, to a certain extent, be “sprouting” already, for films like *Natural Born Killers* to corrupt her. Just as the “decent man,” whom tragedy corrupts, laments behind closed doors, the “decent” moviegoer must privately engage in subtle and/or infrequent acts of violence and dominance (e.g., smacking the dog or pushing her spouse). She is not a violent psychopath with a criminal record. To say that she has a “proclivity for violence” would be an overstatement. In virtue of her irrational part, she occasionally “sees” the attraction of violence; but she reasons that violence is, at best, a necessary evil (i.e., a means of self-defense). She might, for example, desire to attack the man

who disrespects her, but she does not act on her irrational impulse. On Plato's model, this is the sort of viewer who is corrupted by films like *Natural Born Killers* - not the individual who abhors violence in every fiber of her being nor the violent psychopath, who is already thoroughly violent and corrupt. Insofar as many of us fit the description of the "decent viewer," Plato's point is particularly unsettling.

To see how *Natural Born Killers* might affect the "decent" viewer (i.e., the viewer in whom the seed of violence has begun to sprout) consider again the opening scene, wherein Mickey and Mallory slaughter diner patrons after being insulted. It is unlikely that the decent viewer would enjoy only the stylized depiction of violence, cut off from its connection to real violence. Because the decent viewer is prone, in virtue of her irrational part, to perceive aggression as a choice-worthy response to insults (or something like this), she is likely to "sympathize" with the murderous pair; which is to say, she too views the diner patrons' inappropriate flirtations and derogatory sexual remarks (directed at Mallory) as *hostility warranting violence* and feels aggression toward the offensive patrons, hungering for them to be harmed. This appetite for retaliation is vicariously satisfied when Mickey and Mallory savagely murder the patrons. As with the decent theatergoer, the decent moviegoer succumbs to her irrational part and responds in accordance with it, in part because she discerns no danger in feeling aggression with regard to *another person's* affairs.<sup>148</sup> However, in succumbing to her irrational, violence-supporting part and experiencing pleasure in doing so, the decent moviegoer is, like the decent theatergoer, unwittingly conditioned to succumb to her irrational part in real life, in her own interpersonal interactions.

Importantly, this is not a case of a violent viewer projecting her own attitudes about

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148 There might be an interesting parallel here with sporting events. Sports fans have no problem behaving like hooligans, so long as their aggression is expressed with regard to someone else's affairs.



violence onto a film; for the opening scene of *Natural Born Killers* actually *fosters* the axiological illusion that violence is a warranted or attractive response to insult. The victims are portrayed as repulsive rednecks (whereas Mickie and Mallory are cool and beautiful), and the violence is very visually pleasing. So, like the tragic lament, this scene *co-produces* an axiological illusion in concert with the arational part, to which the pleasurable appears choice-worthy and the socially esteemed appears noble or “cool.” Certainly, this scene does not simply *say* that violence is a worthwhile response to personal slights; to repeat, it fosters this appearance, by (a) making Mickie and Mallory reflect social or cultural images of ideal human beings (a handsome, in-love and powerful couple) and (b) making the retaliatory violence so visually appealing. Such representations engage with non-rational aspects of the psyche (i.e., spirit and appetite), which see as noble or “cool” whatever society esteems and see as choice-worthy whatever happens to produce pleasure.

My point is that *both* an improperly educated irrational part *and* a medium that fosters axiological illusions are required to corrupt an individual who is only partially corrupt. This is because such a viewer is not so ruled by her irrational part that she would normally or in most cases (a) view interpersonal interactions through the perspective of her violence-supporting part and/or (b) succumb to or respond in accordance with her violence-supporting part. In other words, the irrational, violence-supporting part of the decent moviegoer lacks perceptual and motivational force. Insofar as films like *Natural Born Killers* strengthen the perceptual and motivational force of the decent viewer's violence-supporting part (by conditioning her to apply and respond in accordance with her violence-supporting perspective), such films are *responsible for* fostering violence in decent viewers.

One might object that we do not actually behave violently in the movies; however, audiences of tragic drama actually lament. They actually engage in the very behavior that Plato

finds so reprehensible. However, as I have noted, Plato targets *excessive* lamentation, of the sort which handicaps practical reason. It is not at all obvious that a few tears shed at a Greek tragedy amount to the sort of full-blown histrionics Achilles displays in the *Iliad*. Similarly, a moviegoer's clenched teeth or fists do not constitute violence. However, in both cases the decent audience member does something that she would not normally do in real life; namely, she succumbs to her own irrational perspective and the emotions and desires it gives rise to. Moreover, insofar as she enjoys succumbing to her irrational perspective and associated emotions and desires, she is (over time) conditioned to succumb to her irrational, violence-supporting part in real life, with regard to her own interpersonal interactions. And this, it seems, is the danger that Oliver Stone overlooks; *Natural Born Killers* might make one “aware” of her inner demon, but at the expense of empowering it.<sup>149</sup>

#### b. The Research on Movie Violence: The Third Alternative

Unfortunately, most of the psychological research on violent film is insensitive to the variable ways in which different films prompt moviegoers to *view* violence. It is not obvious why the mere depiction of violence should cause a nonviolent moviegoer to behave violently. For example, why should *Schindler's List* – a film that prompts moviegoers to view Nazi violence as horrific – cause moviegoers to behave violently? Also, it is not obvious why a film that favorably depicts violence should cause *all* moviegoers to behave violently, since some viewers are wholly opposed to violence in every part of themselves. For example, why should a violent slasher film like *Saw III* instill violent tendencies in moviegoers who instinctively recoil at violence, in all of its manifestations? In effect, media violence researchers regularly fail to take into account the

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<sup>149</sup>There might be a parallel here with the *Iliad*. For example, Smith 2001 argues that the *Iliad* is a critique of Achilles' character and Greek notions of virtue more generally. Even supposing that the *Iliad* did contain such a critique, it seems that Plato's point would still stand.

two factors that determine how viewers *interpret* violence – i.e., viewers' predispositions and the way in which films prompt moviegoers to view violence.

Hence, unsurprisingly, only about half of the thousands of studies on media violence report a positive correlation between violent media and viewer aggression.<sup>150</sup> These inconsistencies are to be expected, if something like Plato's model is right. Not all violent films foster aggression in all viewers. On Plato's model, whether or not exposure to violent films fosters viewer violence or aggression depends on (a) the way in which films prompt viewers to interpret violence (i.e., the sorts of axiological illusion the film fosters) and (b) the predispositions of the viewer. Because movie violence studies normally do not control for a and b, they are flawed.

The minority of researchers who do control for viewer predispositions have found that viewers who have a criminal background or a psychological disorder that predisposes them toward violence are much more likely to feel aggression upon exposure to movie violence (as measure by physiological cues).<sup>151</sup> These researchers conclude that the way in which a violent film portrays violence is immaterial, with regard to “viewers predisposed toward violence” (hereafter, “VPTV's”). This is because VPTV's interpret movie violence through pre-established, maladaptive “schemas” or “implicit theories” that *support* violence – e.g., the implicit theory that insults constitute hostility and should be met with violence. The thought is that regardless of how a film represents violence, a VPTV will perceive the depicted violence positively, in line with her violence-supporting schema.

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<sup>150</sup>Many of these studies should be dismissed on methodological grounds alone, either because they either fail to adequately define aggression or because they fail to adequately measure aggression. See Freedman 2002, especially ch. 10. Cf. Grimes, Anderson & Bergen 2008.

<sup>151</sup>See, for example, Grimes, Anderson & Bergen 2008, 199-212.

In many ways, the public debate about movie violence mirrors academic debates. The debate is polarized between the position that movie violence *causes* viewers to behave violently or aggressively (sometimes referred to as the “causationalist” view) and the position that viewers' violent predispositions cause them to behave violently, irrespective of the content of the film.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, contemporary construals of the third alternative – i.e., the position that viewers' violent predispositions and violent movies *together cause* viewers to behave violently – are inadequate. According to contemporary versions of this third alternative, violent movies “trigger” violent individuals to behave violently or to emulate movie violence, by arousing their appetite for aggression and/or by providing them with ideas of how to carry out acts of aggression or violence.<sup>153</sup> This position – often presented as the sensible alternative to the two other positions – is nevertheless problematic. In particular, proponents of this view do not specify what contribution (if any) violent movies make to viewer aggression. After all, if a violent psychotic interpret all interpersonal relations (violent or not) in accordance with her violence-supporting schema, then a nonviolent film about social injustice (e.g., *Erin Brockovich*) is just as likely to “switch on” her violence-supporting schema as *Kill Bill*. For instance, the violent psychotic might long for the victim of social injustice to retaliate with gross violence; she might, for example, fantasize about Erin Brockovich bombing Pacific Gas and Electric. And indeed, media violence researchers often cite the fact that VPTV's systematically *misinterpret* media (violent or nonviolent) in accordance with their violence or aggression-supporting schemas.<sup>154</sup> Thus, because all movies depict interpersonal relations, all movies strengthen

<sup>152</sup>For the causationalist position, see Bushman, B. and Huesmann, R. 2006; Bushman, B. and Anderson, C. 2001; and Huesmann, R. and Taylor, L. 2006.

<sup>153</sup>This view surfaces more in debates about violent or degrading pornography. See, for example, Adams 2000.

<sup>154</sup>See, for example, Grimes, Anderson & Bergen 2008, 199-211. These researchers conclude that “who is watching is more important than what is being watched. An individual, psychopathically predisposed to aggression, can

VPTV's distorted worldviews. Should all movies and all media therefore be banned? A similar issue surfaces in debates about pornography. Non-sexual images of children can trigger child molesters to aggress against children. Because such depictions “trigger” the deviant behavior of child molesters, should we ban all depictions of children, just as we are prepared to ban violent or sexually degrading depictions of women, on the grounds that they trigger deviant behavior in sex offenders? If this is sufficient grounds for censorship, then it is sufficient grounds for eradicating media altogether. Of course, this is ridiculous; however, it is the unpalatable logical consequence of the “trigger view.”

To be fair, there are more sophisticated versions of the causalist position, which take into account the way in which violence is portrayed. For example, some researchers cite studies which correlate exposure to “pro-violence” pornographic movies – i.e., films that prompt the viewer to see violence against women in a positive light – with increases in misogynist attitudes.<sup>155</sup> Unfortunately, the research is inconclusive, as other studies have failed to reduplicate these results.<sup>156</sup> In any case, the fact remains that such films do not negatively influence the attitudes and/or behaviors of *all* viewers, especially those of female viewers. Moreover, because these studies fail to control for the predispositions of viewers,<sup>157</sup> they are question-begging with regard to the question of whether or not the predispositions of the viewer are also a causal factor

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use whatever resources are available to fulfill that predisposition” (219).

155Russell 1998. Among other studies, she cites a study by Malamuth and Check (1985) in which college students were shown pornographic depictions of women becoming sexually aroused by being raped. They found that the non-control group were significantly more likely (a) to view the rape victim of a second, neutral rape portrayal as suffering less trauma and as enjoying the rape and (b) to believe that women in general enjoy rape.

156See Allen et al. 1995.

157One cannot assume that just because the subjects do not have a criminal record that they are not – at some level - predisposed toward rape or violence.

in fostering aggression against women.

Put simply, media violence scholars appear to face a genuine puzzle. Because violent movies (even “pro-violence” ones) do not foster maladaptive attitudes and dispositions in all viewers, some appeal to viewer predispositions is necessary. However, because VPTV's supposedly misinterpret all (or most) media in accordance with their violence-supporting schemas, it is unclear what causal role (if any) pro-violence films have in actually fostering viewer violence or aggression.

Plato provides a plausible solution to this puzzle. Some violent films – i.e., those that interact with our improperly trained irrational part to produce axiological illusions surrounding violence – can strengthen the motivational and perceptual force of the *nonviolent* viewer's irrational, “non-dominant” (i.e., lacking perceptual and motivation force) perspective on violence. In other words, on Plato's model popular drama corrupts a *partially* corrupt viewer; in particular, an individual who sees the world through both healthy and unhealthy schemas but who is normally guided by healthy schemas. Insofar as certain sorts of violent films invite the viewer to be guided by her unhealthy schema or perspective in responding affectively to the work (and provide the viewer with pleasure in doing so), they strengthen the perceptual and motivational force of an unhealthy schema.

In strengthening the perceptual force of a schema, drama does, to a certain extent, *shape* (as opposed to merely “strengthen”) viewers' dispositions. Recall, drama strengthens the perceptual force of viewers' irrational perspectives by making viewers more likely to apply said perspective to formerly ambiguous stimuli. So, to cite Plato's example, in strengthening our lamentation-supporting perspective, tragedy makes us more likely to apply this perspective to our minor setbacks; we become disposed to lament the little things in life. Similarly, violent films make the decent viewer more likely to apply her violence-supporting perspective to her minor altercations;

she becomes disposed to behave aggressively in response to little insults. So, in a certain sense, drama can shape how (and not just “how often”) we apply and succumb to our irrational perspective in real life.

It seems that films often take a more active role in strengthening the perceptual force of certain perspectives than Socrates explicitly acknowledges. In particular, it seems films can also influence *what* we apply our perspectives or schemas *to*. For example, Alfred Hitchcock's horror film *The Birds*, in which birds stalk townspeople, strengthens the perceptual force of the schema through which we view dangerous creatures, by getting us to apply said schema to formerly ambiguous stimuli (i.e., birds). The film accomplishes this feat by casting birds in a new light, with the result that we think about real birds in a new way – i.e., as potentially dangerous creatures. The film forces us attend to the features of real birds and to recognize new, ominous possibilities therein. The result is that we might develop a fear of real birds (especially right after the film), even though we were not formerly disposed to fear birds. (Anybody who has feared taking a shower after viewing *Psycho* or feared swimming in the ocean after viewing *Jaws* is familiar with this phenomenon.) I point out these examples in order to emphasize that Plato's model is not inconsistent with (and, to some extent, advocates) the view that drama widens the scope of our dispositions and hence plays some role in shaping our dispositions; drama does not only strengthen our dispositions by strengthening our propensity to believe, feel and/or behave in accordance with preformed parts of ourselves.

In sum, Plato's model constitutes a plausible version of a middle ground in the highly polarized media violence debate, in that it retains a causal role for both the content of the movie and the predispositions of the viewer in fostering viewer violence. It is able to explain why exposure to certain sorts of violent films (a) has no impact on some individuals and (b) is partially responsible for fostering aggression or violence in some viewers. Films that foster

axiological illusions surrounding violence corrupt those viewers who possess non-dominant, violence-supporting schemas.

#### IV. How Movies Evoke Emotion: Plato Versus Pretense Theorists

On Plato's model, audience members emotionally respond to fictional scenarios in much the same way that they emotionally respond to real life scenarios. This might seem odd, given that viewers enjoy movies; whereas similar situations, experienced in real life, are unpleasant or worse. Moreover, whereas emotions experienced in real life motivate action (e.g., fear motivates flight), emotions experienced in the theater are not hooked up to action in this way.

These and related worries have motivated “pretense” theories of audience response to film, according to which our emotional engagement with film is part of a game or simulation. Pretense theorist Kendall Walton argues that a fictional film is a prop in a game of make-believe; a given film prompts the spectator to “make-believable” believe propositions and to experience “quasi-emotions” as a result. To cite Walton's example, Charles, watching a horror film about toxic slime, make-believable believes that the slime is dangerous, experiencing quasi-fear as a result. Walton compares Charles to a child, who pretends to be afraid of the pretend monster in a game of make-believe.<sup>158</sup> In contrast, pretense theorist Gregory Currie argues that audience members “simulate” or “imagine” the belief states and psychological traits of fictional characters and (if successful) genuinely feel that which the character fictionally feels. Imagination or simulation is “offline,” in that it does not normally influence our actions. (Merely imagining a bear does not cause one to flee.) As Currie points out, because we empathize with real people in real life by imaginatively simulating their mental states, there is no discontinuity between the way we “make emotional contact with” real life persons and fictional characters.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>Walton 1978.

<sup>159</sup>Currie 1995a.



One odd feature of these accounts is that they focus on non-paradigm cases of audience response. Perhaps sometimes we “fear for ourselves” in the movies, and perhaps once in a while we become so enmeshed in a character that we simulate their mental states and psychological traits, experiencing events as they experience them. However, as Noel Carroll points out, more often audience members feel emotions *for* or *toward* characters;<sup>160</sup> and, as we have seen, when what we feel about a given character and his circumstances (e.g., grief for the tragic hero) reflects a serious inner stance on the character's circumstances that that character himself shares, we can be said to sympathize with the character. As Carroll points out, often what we feel about a given character and her circumstances is very different from what she herself feels. So, for example, when watching *Psycho* we feel fear for the unsuspecting victim, even though she is unafraid, being unaware of the danger lurking behind the shower curtain. Such cases are not instances of sympathy in our sense; however, as I have emphasized, Plato does not intend sympathy to cover all cases of our emotional engagement with drama.

It is unlikely that any one of these models (sympathy, identification or empathy, “feeling for,” etc.) covers all cases of audience response. In any case, instances of “feeling for” and “sympathy” are readily explainable in terms of pretense theory. For instance, the theatergoer might be said to “imagine” or “pretend believe” that the tragic hero's misfortune is terrible and lamentation-worthy. Likewise, the *Natural Born Killers* moviegoer might be said to “imagine” or “pretend believe” that the diner patrons' insults warrant Mickie and Mallory's violent retaliation.

What is less clear is whether or not, for the pretense theorist, the audience member's resulting emotion (here, grief or aggression) are merely make-believe or are genuine. For pretense theorists like Walton, audiences' emotional responses are both like and unlike genuine emotions. They are like genuine emotions in that their physiological component is the same (e.g.,

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<sup>160</sup>Carroll 2006.

the tears, the clenched fist, the sweaty palms, etc.). However, unlike genuine emotions, their object is not real, but fictional. In contrast, some pretense theorists, like Currie, do not assume that genuine emotions necessarily take *real* objects; and so, emotions experienced in the context of imagination or mental simulation qualify as genuine emotions.

To be sure, there is little reason to suppose that imaginary public speaking (i.e., the public speaking that I imagine) evokes my pretend fear; whereas my actually public speaking elicits my real fear. Rather than classify such emotions as pretend, it seems we should, with Currie, dispose of a narrow construal of emotions, according to which emotions are fundamentally constituted by beliefs (as opposed to imaginings) and/or take as their objects real entities.

Moreover, can't I pity, fear or express aggression toward fictional entities which *I imagine to be real*? It is not therefore the case that my pitying Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is tantamount to my pitying a "thought content" or a "Fregean sense," as Walton contends.<sup>161</sup> I pity an individual whom *I imagine to be real*, though it may turn out that the entity in question is fictional or imaginary. Similarly, when I mistake a tree in the forest for a bear, I do not therefore fear an imaginary bear or a thought content or even a Fregean sense; rather, I fear *what I believe to be a real bear*, though it just so happens that the bear does not really exist. We would not therefore conclude that I do not really fear a bear (simply because I am mistaken about its existence), nor should we with regard to fictional entities. The object of a real emotion need not be something real but rather something *imagined* or *believed* to be real. Perhaps there is a more general, metaphysical or logical problem here about how someone can be said to fear something that does not exist. In such case,s what is the fear a fear *of*? What is its object? Supposing that this a genuine problem, it is not a problem specific to fiction.

In any case, we need not solve the "Paradox of Fiction" (and thereby establish that all our

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<sup>161</sup>Walton 1997, 47.

emotional responses to fictions are real) in order to establish that *some* of our emotional responses to fiction are genuine and affect our real life beliefs and behaviors. In fact, Walton claims that fiction taps into our genuine, dispositional emotions, as evidenced by the fact that what we make-believely fear (or imagine fearing) is often determined by what we really do fear. So, it is because Charles has a genuine, dispositional fear of toxic chemicals that he make-believely fears the toxic slime (in the movie theater); similarly, it is because Walton has a genuine, dispositional fear of tight spaces that he experiences quasi-fear when imagining a spelunking mission.<sup>162</sup> According to Walton, this genuine, dispositional fear does not necessarily take an object (and definitely does not take a fictional object). Even so, the “phenomenological upset” (e.g., the palpitating heart, the sweaty palms, etc.) of pretend fearing the pretend slime, the pretend cave, etc. renders the dispositional fear of toxic chemicals, tight spaces, etc. “more occurent.”<sup>163</sup> Thus, in Walton's view, imaging such scenarios can make the imaginer more likely to fear tight spaces and toxic chemicals in real life, in response to real situations. Unfortunately, Walton's thoughts on this issue raise more questions than they answer. How do films “tap into” viewers' genuine, dispositional fears, angers, sadnesses, etc., without rendering them occurent? Supposing that films do render our genuine, dispositional emotions occurent, how do they do so without supplying them with an *object*? Also, why should the “phenomenological upset” of pretend emotions render their genuine, dispositional counterparts “more occurent?”

Currie takes a less promising approach to the question of how our imaginings affect our real world beliefs and behaviors. Currie provides a specific mechanism by which imaginings or simulated beliefs “infect” real beliefs. According to Currie, 'spillage' or 'contagion' – the

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<sup>162</sup>Walton 1997.

<sup>163</sup>This is gestured at in Walton 1997 but came out more fully in my conversations with Walton (April 24, 2012 at Carleton College).

phenomenon of off-line imagining going online – accounts for why the mere simulation of a characters' mental state can result in our actually *having* the relevant mental state.

As Currie himself points out, spillage only occurs with regard to certain sorts of imaginings – i.e., moral or normative imaginings. So, for instance, after watching *Natural Born Killers*, I do not believe that Mickie and Mallory exist, despite having imagined this to be so. However, after having been prompted to imagine certain moral and/or normative contents about violence, my moral or normative beliefs about violence could conceivably be affected. Currie addresses the selectiveness of spillage as follows: Whereas ordinary perception disproves Mickie and Mallory's existence; ordinary perception does not disprove our normative or moral imaginings. So, upon leaving the theater, nothing in my immediate perceptual environment disproves that violence is trivial, attractive, a warranted response to insults, etc. Hence, it is possible that my imagining such contents will “infect” my real beliefs about violence.<sup>164</sup>

Going this route suffers from obvious difficulties. For one thing, we engage in a number of non-moral, non-normative imaginings in the theater, which, though they are not immediately countered by perception, nevertheless do not infect our beliefs. For example, my imagining (in the movie theater) that God exists does not alter my atheism, even though nothing in my immediate perceptual environment straightforwardly disproves the existence of God.

In any case, there is a much deeper problem looming in the background. “Online imagining” is inconsistent with pretense theory's *functionalist* account of the imagination. Like all pretense theorists, Currie endorses a “functionalist” account of imagination or pretense; An imagining is differentiated from a belief by appeal to its functional role, rather than its content. So, an imagining is different from a belief insofar as (a) its input is at the whim of the intention of the artist, the imaginer or both (rather than determined by perception, for example) and (b) it

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<sup>164</sup>Currie 1995b.

does not produce the same behavioral outputs as belief in the same content would produce.<sup>165</sup> In other words, imagination is different from belief with regard to its inputs and outputs. Whereas I can simply input a given content P into my imagination at will; I cannot simply input P into my beliefs. Also, imagining P and believing P motivate very different sorts of behaviors. So, to return to the example of Charles, Charles merely imagines (as opposed to believes) that the toxic slime is dangerous to himself, because his mental state (a) is not caused by any actually existing slime but rather by willingly entertaining the contents of the film and (b) does not motivate the action that a belief that the toxic slime poses a danger to himself would motivate (i.e., his fleeing the theater).

However, on this functionalist account of imagination, general moral and normative contents do not count as imaginings, contrary to what pretense theorists like Currie want to say. As we have seen, by Currie's own admission, general moral or normative imaginings (e.g., imagining that violence is trivial) *do* motivate the same actions that a belief in the same content would motivate. (According to Currie, this is because, in such cases, the belief simulator “goes online” or “spills over” into real belief.) Moreover, this phenomenon occurs because general moral or normative propositions are not disproven by perception. In other words, for Currie, moral or normative propositions expressed in the theater are not *functionally* any different from those expressed in real life; both motivate the same behaviors and are not grounded in perception. Thus, on Currie's own theory, it follows that general moral or normative contents expressed in response to fictional films constitute beliefs, not imaginings.

Here I must emphasize that general moral or normative contents expressed in the theater (e.g., “personal misfortune is terrible”) also function like beliefs with regard to their input (and not just their output). The “imaginability puzzle” - i.e., the supposedly puzzling fact that we are

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<sup>165</sup>Nichols 2006.

unable to imagine abhorrent moral or normative contents in the theater - demonstrates this point nicely. When we watch D.W. Griffith's racist film *The Birth of a Nation* we are unable to will ourselves to imagine that blacks are inferior to whites. What this suggests is that general moral and normative contents (e.g., blacks are inferior to whites, personal misfortune is terrible, insults ought to be met with violence, etc.) are necessarily *believed* – not imagined – in the theater. In other words, entertaining such contents in the theater *requires* that they function as beliefs rather than as imaginings (both with regard to their input and their output). Perhaps this is what Socrates is getting at when, in *Republic X*, he supposed that our seeing something as good or bad entails our *believing* (at some level) that it is good or bad. Of course, what I have said does not solve the Imaginability Puzzle. Why *can't* we imagine contents that we believe to be morally abhorrent? Why *can't* I imagine that violence is “no big deal?” I do not presently have a worked out answer to this question. However, regardless of the answer, my main point stands: Plato is right to think that theatergoers *genuinely believe* general moral and normative contents in the theater. Pretense theory does not represent a real challenge to Plato in this regard.

So, what of the puzzles with which we started; namely, the fact that emotions expressed in the theater are not unpleasant and are not hooked up to action in the same way as their real life counterparts? More specifically, if the theatergoer genuinely grieves for Achilles, then why does he not console Achilles, and why does he enjoy his experience? In answering this question, it is necessary to highlight the very important role of imagination in our emotional engagement with fiction. The theatergoer occurrently believes that “personal misfortune is terrible” when he *imagines* (not believes) that the hero and his misfortune to exist. However, the resulting content – i.e., “the tragic hero's misfortune is terrible” - is *believed*, not imagined. This is because (a) the same content – expressed about a real, albeit absent, stranger – would elicit the very same behavior (tears without consultation) and (b) we cannot, as with imaginings, will ourselves to

regard the hero's misfortune as terrible (since our perception of the hero's misfortune is grounded in our real beliefs about the nature of personal loss). In other words, the theatergoer believes (as opposed to imagines) the proposition "the tragic hero's misfortune is terrible," because the proposition functions as a belief, with regard to its input and output. Importantly, the audience member's belief that the tragic hero's misfortune is terrible does not include or presuppose the *belief* that the tragic hero and his misfortune really do exist before him, which is why it generates the same behavioral output as believing that an absent stranger suffers a terrible misfortune. Thus, it is no surprise that the audience member does not engage in the same behaviors (and experience the same unpleasantness) that a belief that the hero and his misfortune are really present would generate.

## V. Conclusion

There are many virtues of Plato's audience psychology, which I have interpreted, explored, expanded upon and defended. Plato is right to think that we express genuine emotions and authentic normative and moral beliefs in the theater. What is more, by acknowledging this fact, Plato is easily able to explain why certain sorts of violent movies can negatively influence some viewers' real world beliefs, desires and behaviors. Moreover, Plato's distinction between dominant and non-dominant predispositions enables him to explain how popular drama is responsible for corrupting adults; popular dramas that foster axiological illusions can strengthen the motivational and perceptual force of viewers' unhealthy, non-dominant predispositions.

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