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Comedy, Catharsis, and the Emotions: From Aristotle to Proclus

Abstract

This article takes a fresh look at ancient theories about the catharsis afforded by comedy. I adopt the model of Aristotelian catharsis proposed by Richard Janko and Stephen Halliwell and argue that Aristotle thought that comedy should elicit, and thus effect catharsis of, not only pleasurable emotions, such as the emotion associated with laughter, but also certain painful ones as well. In particular, Aristotle hints in the *Poetics* that certain comic plots elicit the painful emotion indignation as part of the process of eliciting pleasurable emotions that I call 'justified schadenfreude' and 'justified gratulation'. These emotions are intertwined with fear and pity in Aristotle's philosophy of the emotions, and thus the catharsis of such a comedy complements the catharsis of tragedy. I next turn to later theories in the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, Iamblichus, and Proclus. These tend to distort or diverge from Aristotle's theory, but all four are in agreement in one important respect: comedy produces real emotions, and those emotions are in need of catharsis.

During his discussion of Aristotle's catharsis, Paul Woodruff offers a rather ghoulish description of theories and their theorists: "Interpretations of *katharsis* are a cemetery of the living dead; not one of the proposed accounts remains unburied by scholars, and yet not one of them stays in its grave" (2009: 619). The project of constructing an account of the catharsis of comedy entails especial ghoulishness. While Aristotle at least mentions a tragic catharsis, he says nothing about a comic one. If he did theorize a catharsis of comedy, as I shall argue he did, then we must begin from a theory of catharsis oriented towards tragedy, saw off some limbs, and make others fit. An inquiry into Aristotle's comic catharsis will, therefore, be polemical, speculative, and tentative. But, as I hope to show, there is enough evidence to pose the important questions and give plausible answers.

I cannot offer here a full general account of catharsis and make a defense of it; I can only describe which body I have unearthed. My views are based on the accounts formulated in recent years most importantly by Stephen Halliwell and Richard Janko.[1] These take catharsis to refer to the exercise

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[1] Halliwell 1998: 168-201; 2009; 2011: 208-65; Janko 1984: 139-51; 1987: xvi-xx; 1992; 2001: 60-6; 2011: 372-7. Important predecessors are House 1956: 100-11 and Lord 1982:

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of emotions through mimesis such that those same emotions become better attuned in ordinary life. For example, by seeing in tragedy a mimesis of actions that elicit pity and fear in an appropriate way, one may feel pity and fear more appropriately outside the theatre. One merit of such an account is that it acknowledges that, for Aristotle, the emotions are to be correctly cultivated, not entirely purged. A second is that this account acknowledges the cognitive and intellectual dimensions of catharsis.[2] For my purposes, its most important features are that catharsis operates on the emotions of the spectators (rather than being within the drama itself),[3] that it functions homeopathically (rather than allopathically),[4] and that it conditions the emotions (rather than purges them).[5]

I shall begin with the question of whether Aristotle theorized a comic catharsis and then inquire into its nature. My analysis will, as much as possible, rely on the extant Aristotelian corpus, particularly the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. I shall show that this material can be used to construct provocative (but hardly definitive) responses to the most difficult and important question about Aristotle's catharsis of comedy, if he did theorize one: on what emotions does comedy ideally effect catharsis? I suggest that Aristotle's theory of the comic catharsis is subtle. While comedy for Aristotle elicits and effects catharsis on pleasurable emotions, such as the emotion associated with laughter, it may activate painful emotions as well. In particular, I argue that the *Poetics* hints that one type of comic plot elicits the painful emotion

119-79; for further representatives, see Janko 1992: 356, n. 27.

[2] As has become abundantly clear in recent years, owing especially to the work of William Fortenbaugh (see Fortenbaugh 2002 in particular), the emotions for Aristotle not only influence judgment but are constituted from evaluations and predictions; if catharsis is related to the emotions, it will also be related to cognition.

[3] This crux depends on whether the reference to παθήματα in the catharsis clause at *Poet.* 1449b28 refers to the emotions of the spectators or to the incidents of the play. I accept the former; if the incidents are really at issue, then catharsis pertains more particularly to the action of the drama, and the spectators' emotions are only indirectly implicated. For this interpretation, see especially Else 1957: 227-32, 423-50; Nehamas 1994: 272-80.

[4] See Belfiore 1992: 257-360 for the argument that catharsis is allopathic.

[5] For scepticism about this theory, see Ford 2004, but also Halliwell 2011: 236-60, answering many criticisms, most importantly the supposed dichotomy between catharsis and education. There are too many competing formulations of catharsis to enumerate here. But of particular significance are the conception of catharsis as the purgation of pathological emotions (most influentially formulated by Bernays 1880) and the conception of catharsis as intellectual clarification (see Golden 1992a: 5-40; for previous expressions, see ibid.: 32, n. 31). The former relies on an un-Aristotelian view of the emotions, whereas the latter privileges the intellect at the expense (it seems to me) of the emotions, which, of course, include a cognitive component. For these and other views, see surveys in Halliwell 1998: 350-6; Munteanu 2012: 238-50.

indignation as part of the process of activating pleasurable emotions that I call 'justified gratulation' and 'justified schadenfreude'.

After considering Aristotle, I shall turn to three later sources that mention a catharsis of comedy, the *Tractatus Coislinanus*, Iamblichus, and Proclus. Here, too, we are sometimes left reassembling *disiecta membra*, but here, too, we can speculate profitably. These theories are varied, and they approach the work of comedy in different ways and have different evaluations of its emotional effects. Yet they and Aristotle all agree that comedy elicits real emotions, that those emotions have real effects, and that those effects must be explained by positing a catharsis of the emotions of comedy – that, in short, comedy and its emotions are serious business indeed.

1. Would Aristotle Have Theorized a Catharsis of Comedy?

The idea that Aristotle would have attributed a catharsis to comedy has sometimes been disputed. Tragedy elicits painful emotions like pity and fear, and it is perhaps intuitive that these emotions require catharsis. I shall discuss the emotions of comedy in detail below, but among them seem to be pleasurable emotions related to laughter. Some scholars have rejected the comic catharsis entirely on the ground that such pleasurable emotions need no catharsis.[6] I shall argue, firstly, that there is no reason to believe that Aristotle restricted catharsis to tragedy and, secondly, that there are good reasons to think that he applied the concept to comedy.

Aristotle evidently thought that various forms of mimesis, and not just comedy, could effect catharsis. This view relies on the idea that the references to catharsis in book 8 of the *Politics* have a near connection to the catharsis mentioned in the *Poetics*, as most contemporary scholars accept.[7] There are two persuasive reasons to presume a connection. Firstly, the references to catharsis in the *Politics*, like the catharsis clause in the *Poetics*, regard mimesis and the emotions; pity and fear are mentioned as specific examples (1342a4-7, 11-15), which is, if not a direct reference to tragedy, a reference with direct relevance to tragedy.[8] Secondly, in the same passage where he

[6] Sceptics include Gudeman 1934: 145, 166; Post 1938: 24-5; Else 1957: 447; Olson 1968: 34-6, 45; Lord 1982: 149, 175-7, with n. 54; Micalella 2004: 96-9.

[7] See especially the discussion in Halliwell 2011: 238-60 on the applicability of catharsis in the *Politics* to the *Poetics*. For dissent, see Golden 1992a: 5-39; Flashar 2007: 17-79; and n. 10 below.

[8] For the reference to tragedy, see Janko 1992: 345; 2011: 519; Halliwell 2011: 238, 244-5. Cf. *Pol.* 1341a21-4: the *aulos* is more exciting (ὀργιαστικόν) than ethical (i.e., related to character), so it is more suitable for catharsis than learning. Aristotle is discussing music generally there, but it is worth noting that both tragedy and comedy featured

makes this allusion, Aristotle says that he will speak in a clearer fashion on the subject of catharsis in the *Poetics* (1341b38-40). This statement may itself be an indication that he theorized a catharsis of comedy: the clearer account of catharsis does not, of course, appear in the extant *Poetics*. If the reference is to the lost second book, which included the more complete discussion of comedy, the reason may be that catharsis is applicable to both comedy and tragedy.[9] In any case, given these resemblances, the catharsis of the *Politics* probably has bearing on the catharsis of the *Poetics*.

If the catharsis of the *Politics* does help explain the catharsis of the *Poetics*, one consequence is that there is no reason to presume that catharsis applies to tragedy alone. Aristotle says that the benefits of music generally are education, leisure (διαγωγή), and catharsis. Soon after, he notes that those who are prone to ecstasy can experience catharsis and be restored by certain songs; the same can happen to those who are disposed to pity (ἐλεήμονας) and fear (φοβητικούς), as well as those who are prone to the emotions generally (παθητικούς); others, to whatever extent they experience the emotions, will experience catharsis, too. Such music, Aristotle says, should be used by performers in the theatre (1341b32-42a18). The catharsis of the *Politics* is evidently a benefit of various kinds of music and operates on various emotions by rousing them intensely. This passage is complex and controversial, to be sure, and reasonable people will continue to differ about what it means and how it relates to the catharsis clause in the *Poetics*.[10] But it should give us cause to doubt the ideas that catharsis is a special feature of tragedy and that it operates only on pity and fear.

It is, therefore, possible that Aristotle applied the concept of catharsis to comedy. There are good reasons why he may have done so. Most scholars who have objected to the idea that Aristotle posited a comic catharsis contend that comedy is pleasurable and concerned with laughter, and pleasurable emotions need no catharsis. Yet even emotions that are pleas-

the *aulos*. Presumably it contributed to arousing the emotions and thus effecting each genre's catharsis.

[9] Thus Lucas (1968: 288): "Aristotle might have reserved his full treatment of *katharsis* for the section on comedy because it provided the more important illustration"; cf. Janko 2011: 518. But see as well Lord 1982: 148-50, resurrecting an earlier suggestion that Aristotle's promise refers to a lost discussion of poetry that came later in the *Politics* itself (one of Lord's reasons is that Aristotle would not have discussed catharsis in the sections of the *Poetics* on comedy); cf. Halliwell 1998: 190-1, n. 32.

[10] See especially Ford 2004, arguing that by music Aristotle means rhythms and tunes without words, thus excluding tragedy, as well as comedy and epic, from the discussion; the relationship between musical and dramatic catharsis would, therefore, be more ambiguous. Cf. Heath 2013: 17-18; Ford 2015: 6, n. 19; for the view *contra*, see Janko 1992: 343-6; 2011: 375, n. 1.

urable and related to laughter can be inappropriate and require moderation. Aristotle's student Theophrastus furnishes us with an example that appeared as an anecdote in his lost treatise *On Comedy*. The Tirynthians, he tells us, were useless with respect to serious things because they loved to laugh too much, and they wanted to be freed from this affliction (or passion: the word is πάθος). For advice they consulted the Dephic Oracle, which told them that their hypergelasm would cease if they could conduct a sacrifice to Poseidon without laughing (an exercise at which they failed due to a child's inopportune pun).[11] It is true that laughter and its emotions can be pleasurable, but they still need to be exercised appropriately. Aristotle himself explains more mundane deviations from the appropriate disposition with respect to jesting in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He calls one deviation buffoonery, meaning the tendency to pursue jests all the time, even in inappropriate circumstances; Aristotle mentions in this context the tendency to enjoy jests more than is appropriate. The other deviation is boorishness, which characterizes the man who tells no jokes himself and refuses to enjoy jests of others (1127b33-1128b9).[12]

Thus even pleasurable emotions that are related to laughter need to be activated at the right time, at the right objects, and to the proper degree. This need for moderation alone is a justification for a comic catharsis: Aristotle, we might suppose, could have posited comedy as a means for achieving balance in such emotions. But comedy is directly implicated in these problems by Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato lodges a series of charges against poetry, among which is the complaint that spectators' emotional responses to poetry lead to excessive emotional responses in ordinary life. He singles out comedy and tragedy in particular. Tragedy, he argues, leads one to indulge one's sense of pity inappropriately outside the theatre, and comedy leads one to joke inappropriately outside the theatre (606a-d). Shortly thereafter, he challenges the champions of poetry to justify its presence in a well-ordered state (607d). The *Poetics* as a project has, of course, been conventionally taken to be a response to the challenge, with catharsis as a retort to the particular charge that drama (and poetry in general) deleteriously affects spectators' control over their emotions.[13] Plato's complaint is that viewing

[11] Athen. 261d-e (= Theophr. fr. 709 Fortenbaugh). For the possibility that the anecdote relates to catharsis, see Fortenbaugh 2003: 106; 2005: 374-5.

[12] For the bearing of this passage on Aristotle's comic catharsis, cf. Janko 1992: 350-1; 2001: 65-6.

[13] Certainly Proclus saw Aristotle's catharsis of tragedy and comedy as a response to Plato's complaints: see *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, vol. 1: 42 and 49 Kroll (= *On Poets* fr. 56 Janko = fr. 81a Rose); cf. perhaps Olympiodorus *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias* 172.6-23, although the reference there is not clearly to Aristotle or his school. For contemporary expressions, see, e.g. Janko 1987: x-xiv; 1992: 342-3, 352-3; Golden: 1992a;

tragedy will make one too disposed to pity – ἐλεήμων, as Aristotle calls it in the *Politics* – and comedy will make one a buffoon. Aristotle's answer is that tragedy and comedy, when properly composed, do no such thing. Rather, they effect a catharsis of the emotions that those genres elicit. A theory of a comic catharsis is just as necessary as a tragic one.

2. On What Emotions Does Comedy Effect Catharsis?

I have suggested that Aristotle does not seem to restrict catharsis to tragedy; that the emotions of comedy would benefit from catharsis even if they are pleasurable; and that, if catharsis is a response to Plato's claims about the effects of drama on the emotions, Aristotle would have theorized a comic catharsis. The contours of the theory are, however, harder to map. The central and most difficult question is what specific emotions should be activated by comedy. Most earlier interpretations operate on the premise that catharsis is purgation and suggest that comedy, if it does achieve a salutary effect on ordinary spectators that persists beyond the theatre, purges emotions like anger, envy, and scorn.[14] But, as mentioned above, I reject the idea that Aristotle would have suggested that the emotions need to be purged in most people (although certain authors later in antiquity make this claim, as we shall see); rather, for Aristotle the emotions need to be conditioned such that they are exercised properly.[15]

Halliwell 1998: 184-5. For scepticism, see Nehamas 1994; Ford 2004; Woodruff 2009: 621-2; Ford 2015.

[14] Cooper (1922: 60-98) suggests a catharsis of "anger and envy" on the ground that laughing at comic exaggerations will purge the spectator of his sense of disproportion; along similar lines, Tierney (1936: 250-3) suggests envy (φθόνος) and malice (ἐπιχαιρεκακία). Smith (1928: 153-6), reviewing Cooper, proposes that the emotions of comedy derive from situations that "demolish the superiority of those we envy and establish in ourselves a sense of superiority over those with whom we are angry" and calls those emotions a mixture of "innocent mirth" and "malicious fun". Lucas (1968: 287-8), however, suggests a purgation of "scorn and over-confidence", and, perhaps, the antisocial impulses that societal strictures keep in check; cf. Sorabji 2000: 290-1, concurring with scorn and adding "the desire to laugh". Milanezi (2000: 388-96) entertains the possibility that comedy purges emotions like anger, envy, indignation, and the desire for revenge in spectators on the one hand but also uses ridicule to incite them to action on the other. Sutton (1994), beginning from Aristotle and the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, develops his own theory that comedy purges pity, fear, and other anxieties through laughter.

[15] For an interpretation of catharsis that takes it be a conditioning rather than purgation, certain bad emotions like envy (φθόνος) must be ruled out entirely from comedy because they are always faults. Envy, for example, is itself a deviation from the mean of indignation (*Nic. Eth.* 1107a8-17 and 1108a35-b6; *Eud. Eth.* 1233b16-25; cf. *Top.* 109b35-8; *Rhet.* 1387b21-88a28).

I shall begin my account from an elegant solution proposed by Janko that looks at the catharsis of drama in the round and divides the range of the emotions between comedy and tragedy. He has argued that the catharsis clause in the *Poetics* does not restrict the emotions of tragedy to pity and fear, even if pity and fear are singled out; rather, tragedy arouses and effects catharsis on painful emotions generally, including, for example, anger. He concludes that tragedy operates on the painful emotions, whereas comedy operates on the pleasurable emotions (Janko 1992: 349-51; cf. Janko 1984: 156-61; 1987: 83, 161-2; 2001: 65). I agree that, in the end, comedy elicits pleasurable emotions (and tragedy painful ones). But this broad characterization of the genre is less useful when thinking more precisely about the emotions that, according to Aristotle, may be elicited over the course of a particular comedy. I shall suggest that, while Aristotle indeed identified certain pleasurable emotions as proper to comedy, he allows space for certain painful ones as well.

There are two grounds for looking beyond a strict division between the pleasurable emotions of comedy and the painful ones of tragedy.[16] The first is that, while Aristotle clearly associates emotions with pleasure and pain, he does not clearly regard pain and pleasure to be exclusive genera into which all emotions can be classified.[17] In the case of anger, for example, Aristotle defines it as a desire for a perceived revenge accompanied by pain at a perceived slight by someone who is not fit to commit the slight (*Rhet.* 1378a31-3). Thus pain accompanies anger. But pleasure also attends all anger (πάσῃ ὀργῇ ἕπεσθαί τινα ἡδονήν), namely pleasure at the hope of revenge (*Rhet.* 1378b1-2; cf. 1370b29-33).[18] If a tragedy does elicit anger, it engenders

[16] Belfiore (1992: 269-70) raises a separate objection to Janko's formulation that must be rejected. Belfiore argues that some painful emotions contradict one another, and thus tragedy cannot operate on the painful emotions generally. Anger, for example, is incompatible explicitly with fear (*Rhet.* 1380a33) and implicitly with pity (*Rhet.* 1380b14, with 1380a5). But even if one cannot experience anger at the same time as pity, one can, over the course of a tragedy, experience different emotions at different times towards different agents. One may, for example, feel pity for Antigone and fear at the sufferings that Creon will bring about; after they have been brought to pass and the sense of fear is gone, one may feel anger at Creon but then, finally, pity him at the end of the drama. In addition, Aristotle says that fear is sometimes felt to the exclusion of pity (*Rhet.* 1385b32-4, 1386a21-4), yet they (and they alone!) remain incontrovertibly associated with tragedy.

[17] For the connection of the emotions to pleasure and pain, see *Rhet.* 1378a19-21, as well as *Nic. Eth.* 1105b21-3; *Eud. Eth.* 1220b12-14. Dow (2015: 131-81) offers a useful discussion on this connection in the *Rhetoric* in particular.

[18] Cf. the comparable characterization of θυμός at *Nic. Eth.* 1116b23-17a9; *Eud. Eth.* 1228b31. To the conception of anger as painful but also pleasurable, compare Aristotle's general discussion of pleasure in *Rhet.* 1.11: most desires (ἐπιθυμίαι) yield pleasure from either the memory of their fulfillment in the past or the prospect of their fulfillment in

both pain and pleasure.[19] Furthermore, even if Aristotle broadly associates the emotions with pain and pleasure, some do not fit obviously into either category. One of the differentia between hatred and anger is that the former is not accompanied by pain (*Rhet.* 1382a11-13); yet Aristotle does not instead associate it with pleasure.[20] There may be emotions that are simply pleasurable or simply painful, and most emotions may fall into one of these categories. But these categories are not exclusive or exhaustive and cannot provide a precise map of the dramatic emotions.

The second ground for looking beyond a strict divide between the painful emotions of tragedy and the pleasurable emotions of comedy is narratological. Aristotle describes certain pleasurable emotions as counterparts to or even consequences of painful emotions. For example, the man who feels indignation (τὸ νεμεσᾶν, pain at undeserved success) may feel pleasure at deserved misfortune (*Rhet.* 1386b25-87a3; *Eud. Eth.* 1233b24-6). He does not give a distinct name to this emotion, but we might term it 'justified schadenfreude'.[21] This has obvious implications for comedy. Feeling the pleasure of justified schadenfreude at the conclusion of the *Clouds* because Socrates and his students have gotten their just deserts may well entail feeling the pain of

the future. Thus mourning, for example, consists not only of pain at the lost but also pleasure at the memory of the same (1370b14-29). Desire is not counted among the emotions in the *Rhetoric*, but see *Nic. Eth.* 1105b21; *Eud. Eth.* 1220b13. On the theory of pleasure in *Rhet.* 1.11, including its Platonic influence, see Frede 1996; Striker 1996; Dow 2015: 163-77. See as well Sorabji 1999, discussing in particular Aspasius's (incorrect) view that Aristotle divided the emotions into the genera of pleasure and pain (*CAG* 19.1, 42.27-47.2).

[19] Here, I follow Halliwell in supposing that emotions that are described as self-regarding in the *Rhetoric*, such as fear (i.e., in the *Rhetoric* fear is felt at the prospect of one's *own* suffering), are experienced vicariously in tragedy (and, we must suppose, comedy) for the prospects of others. See Halliwell 1998: 176-7; 2002: 217-18, with n. 32; 2012: 249-50; cf. Nehamas 1994: 268-72 for similar conclusions on different grounds. If this is not the case, and the view of e.g. Konstan 2006: 155, 324, n. 43 is correct that such emotions are strictly self-regarding (meaning, even when watching tragedy, we feel fear only for our own prospective suffering), then anger, along with some other of the self-regarding emotions, may not be elicited by drama.

[20] It is perhaps significant that Aristotle's definition of the emotions at *Eud. Eth.* 1220b12-14 is rather equivocal: "I call emotions such things as anger, fear, shame, and desire, in general (ὅλως) the things which in themselves are attended, for the most part (ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολύ), by perceived pleasure or pain". But see as well Dow (2015: 153-5), with further bibliography, for attempts to explain cases like hatred that seem to be unaccompanied by pleasure or pain.

[21] Aristotle gives the example of father killers and murderers getting their comeuppance; Coker 1992 calls this emotion 'proper schadenfreude'. Kristjánsson (2006: 96-9) suggests that it is more particularly a sense of satisfaction at seeing someone at whom one earlier felt indignation get his just deserts and thus calls it 'satisfied indignation'.

indignation earlier on, when Socrates and his students enjoyed undeserved good fortune.[22] Thus the *Clouds* engenders a painful emotion in order later to engender a pleasurable one. I shall return to this possibility later.

The single barrier to the idea that comedy may elicit painful emotions is the definition of the laughable at *Poetics* 1449a34-7, quoted below, where Aristotle delimits it to an error or ugliness that does not involve pain and is not destructive. This statement has sometimes been taken to mean that comedy should not elicit pain for its audience.[23] But this interpretation presses the statement too hard: Aristotle is more directly contrasting the treatment of characters in comedy from their treatment in tragedy, in which characters are indeed exposed to pain and destruction. The passage has bearing on the audience's emotions only indirectly through how it restricts the events of the play. If the laughable precludes pain and destruction, then it is incompatible with fear, which is a response to a painful or destructive evil (*Rhet.* 1382a21-2; cf. *Eud. Eth.* 1229a33-5). For the same reason, the laughable must also be incompatible with pity, since pity, too, is a response to a painful or destructive evil (*Rhet.* 1385b13-16).[24] But other emotions that have a painful valence may still be available to comedy. Even if comedy does ultimately aim at emotions that are pleasurable, we must entertain the idea that painful emotions also have a place.

This much has only served to broaden the possibilities; we must now consider the particular emotions that Aristotle might have ascribed to the genre. In addition to the pleasurable emotions generally, Janko has adduced laughter as a particular emotion that Aristotle associated with comedy.[25] This must be correct. It will not do to say that Aristotle would not have spoken of laughter as an emotion. He certainly can speak of emotions and their physical signals as synonymous: thus he says "shuddering" (φρίττει) when he means the emotion fear (*Poet.* 1453b5). Certainly Plato regards laughter to be just as much an emotion as envy is (*Phlb.* 50a) and speaks of laughter as part of the emotional response to comedy (*Rep.* 606c).[26] Beyond the associa-

[22] See Golden (1992a: 95-7), who uses the end of the *Clouds* to illustrate his own theory about Aristotle's comic catharsis.

[23] Else 1957: 189**;** Janko 1992: 357, n. 42; Micalella 2004: 22-4. Cf. Golden 1992a: 90, n. 88, 93 with n. 91, allowing that comedy may cause pain, but that the pain is quickly nullified by jest.

[24] Cf. *Rhet.* 1386b4, where Aristotle notes that the sufferings of noble people (σπουδαῖοι) are especially pitiable; presumably the inferior types of comedy are, conversely, not especially pitiable.

[25] Janko 1984: 143, 156-61; 1987: 79, 168-9; 1992: 350-1; Halliwell (1998: 274-5, n. 33) expresses unwarranted scepticism.

[26] Cf. [Longinus] *Subl.* 38.6: "Laughter is an emotion in the ambit of pleasure" (ὁ γέλως πάθος ἐν ἡδονῇ). It will also not do to say that there is no need for a catharsis

tion between comedy and laughter in Plato, Janko's reasoning is based partly on the *Tractatus Coislinanius*, which I discuss below, but also partly on the *Poetics* itself. Aristotle describes comedy thus (*Poet.* 1449a32-7):

> ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία ἐστὶν ὥσπερ εἴπομεν μίμησις φαυλοτέρων μέν, οὐ μέντοι κατὰ πᾶσαν κακίαν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ ἐστι τὸ γελοῖον μόριον. τὸ γὰρ γελοῖόν ἐστιν ἁμάρτημά τι καὶ αἶσχος ἀνώδυνον καὶ οὐ φθαρτικόν, οἷον εὐθὺς τὸ γελοῖον πρόσωπον αἰσχρόν τι καὶ διεστραμμένον ἄνευ ὀδύνης.
>
> [Comedy, as we have said, is a mimesis of inferior people – not, however, in every vice; rather, the laughable is part of the ugly. The laughable is a certain error and ugliness that is painless and not destructive. For example, the laughable mask is something ugly and warped without pain.]

This passage poses problems for our purposes because Aristotle's description focuses on externals. He mentions laughter (a signal of emotion) and the causes that stimulate it, but does not give a full account of the emotion itself. Nor does Aristotle describe this emotion in the *Rhetoric*.[27] We must reconstruct it ourselves.

Fortenbaugh has hypothesized a few definitions for laughter in Aristotle using Aristotle's anatomy of emotion, which describes an emotion in terms of 1) the object of the emotion; 2) the grounds of the emotion; and 3) the state or circumstances of the subject feeling the emotion (Fortenbaugh 2003: 91-106, esp. 98-100; cf. Fortenbaugh 2002: 20-1, 120-6). I shall try to do the same for the emotion that Aristotle would have associated with comic laughter in particular on the basis of both this passage and his other statements about the emotions in the *Rhetoric*. I shall refer to the emotion itself as the 'laughter emotion', which is a rather ugly term that I have borrowed from Elder Olson's discussion of Aristotle and comedy (1968: 10-11). However, it has the merits of distinguishing the emotion that produces laughter in comedy from the laughter that can arise from a variety of other physical or emotional causes[28] and of not having the connotations of words like amusement, mirth, or cheer. We might define the laughter emotion in comedy thus:

> The laughter emotion is a pleasure[29] felt at people who appear to be inferior,

of the emotion associated with laughter: see, e.g., the anecdote about the Tirynthians recounted above.

[27] He may have given an account of laughter in the second book of the *Poetics* or, more likely, in one of his lost works on the emotions.

[28] For example, we would want to exclude the nervous laughter that might accompany an emotion like fear or laughter that is a consequence of purely physical causes (e.g. Aristotle mentions that blows to the diaphragm can cause laughter at *Part. An.* 673a10-12; cf. Fortenbaugh 2003: 97, with n. 21-2).

[29] For laughter (or, rather, a type of laughter) as pleasant, cf. *Rhet.* 1371b33-72a1 and 1380b2-5.

> and it is felt when they appear to be involved in ugliness or error that is not painful or destructive.[30] Some people will be predisposed to the laughter emotion because of their character.[31] In addition, one may feel the laughter emotion without being in any prior emotional state, but other pleasures, such as having already experienced the laughter emotion, may dispose one to it as well.[32]

Aristotle would have clarified the nature of the ugliness or error and adduced other causes for laughter in the lost book of the *Poetics*; in the *Rhetoric*, he points the reader in that direction for his division of the laughable into men, words, and deeds (*Rhet.* 1371b35-72a2; cf. 1419b1-6).[33] Even allowing for those additions, this definition is incomplete and unsatisfying: surely there are other emotions that can facilitate the laughter emotion in comedy. Our discussion of the emotions of comedy generally is also incomplete and unsatisfying: it may be that comedy for Aristotle can elicit emotions that are unconnected to the laughter emotion, just as it may be that tragedy can elicit an emotion like anger that is unconnected to (or even opposed to) fear.[34]

A particular deficiency of this account is that the laughter emotion could just as well be elicited by short, disconnected skits as by a comedy; but Aristotle thought that plot is essential to comedy, just as it is for tragedy.[35] It would be useful here to know what he thought to be the ideal story arc for comedy so that we could extrapolate from it the ideal emotional arc for its spectators. Aside from his definition of the laughable, there is one other major clue. During his discussion of the tragic plot, Aristotle turns to the question of how the ideal tragedy should end (*Poet.* 1453a30-9):

> δευτέρα δ' ἡ πρώτη λεγομένη ὑπὸ τινῶν ἐστιν σύστασις, ἡ διπλῆν τε τὴν σύστασιν ἔχουσα καθάπερ ἡ Ὀδύσσεια καὶ τελευτῶσα ἐξ ἐναντίας τοῖς βελτίοσι καὶ χείροσιν. . . . ἔστιν δὲ οὐχ αὕτη ἀπὸ τραγῳδίας ἡδονὴ ἀλλὰ

[30] I use "appear" in both clauses to preserve the evaluative quality of the emotions for Aristotle; compare, e.g. the definition of anger: "Let anger be defined as the desire, accompanied by pain, for apparent (φαινομένης) revenge on account of an apparent (φαινομένην) slight . . . " (*Rhet.* 1378a1-3).

[31] Thus youths are "laughter lovers" (φιλογέλωτες) at *Rhet.* 1389b10-11; cf. Fortenbaugh 2003: 103-6.

[32] For the idea that pleasures can complement each other, see, e.g. *Rhet.* 1380b2-5, describing how one is disposed to calmness when one is free from pain and enjoying other pleasures.

[33] The explanation of the laughable quoted above is clearly meant to contrast the content of comedy and tragedy rather than to be a comprehensive definition.

[34] On painful emotions that oppose each other, see n. 16 above.

[35] Cf. *Poet.* 1449b5-9 and 1451a36-b15: comedy differs from iambus precisely because the comic poets produced generalized plots, i.e. plots that are complete and causally coherent; see especially Heath 1989: 348-52.

> μᾶλλον τῆς κωμῳδίας οἰκεία· ἐκεῖ γὰρ οἳ ἂν ἔχθιστοι ὦσιν ἐν τῷ μύθῳ, οἷον Ὀρέστης καὶ Αἴγισθος, φίλοι γενόμενοι ἐπὶ τελευτῆς ἐξέρχονται, καὶ ἀποθνῄσκει οὐδεὶς ὑπ' οὐδενός.
>
> [The structure that some call best is second best (for tragedy). This is a tragedy that has a double structure like the *Odyssey* and concludes with the opposite outcome for those who are better and for those who are worse. . . . But this is not the pleasure from tragedy; rather, it is appropriate for comedy. There, those who are the worst enemies in the story, such as Orestes and Aegisthus, go off in the end having become friends, and nobody kills anybody.]

We are left with two possible comic plots. It is not clear which, if either, Aristotle rates best. The first is a 'just deserts' plot: such a comedy features inferior people involved in ugliness and errors; some characters are good and some are bad, and these two groups are probably, as in the *Odyssey*, at odds with each other. In the end, the good have a good outcome and the bad get their comeuppance (however, unlike the *Odyssey*, their deserts presumably do not include death, given Aristotle's observation that pain and destruction are outside the bailiwick of the laughable).[36] The second is an 'enemies reconciled' plot: this comedy likewise features inferior people involved in ugliness and errors who are at odds with each other. Unlike in the 'just deserts' comedy, we cannot tell whether the characters need be good or bad; in any case, the play resolves with their bitter hatred becoming friendship.[37]

The emotional arc of the 'just deserts' plot corresponds to an emotional arc that I alluded to earlier. Aristotle identifies an emotion that he calls 'indignation', τὸ νεμεσᾶν, which is pain at undeserved good fortune (*Rhet.* 1386b9-87b20; cf. *Nic. Eth.* 1108a35-b6; *Eud. Eth.* 1233b24-6); the spectator may feel this emotion during the play when the bad parties are enjoying their undeserved success, or at least have yet to receive their deserved punishment. Indeed, Leon Golden has suggested that indignation is the distinctive emotion of comedy for Aristotle (Golden 1992a: 92-7; 1992b; cf. Quinn 2001). In the *Poetics*, Golden argues, tragedy and comedy are constructed as antipodal. Tragedy features a loftier type; comedy features an inferior type. In tragedy, the characters experience pain and destruction; in comedy they are involved in ugliness and errors that are painless and not destructive. Tragedy evokes pity and fear, which are concerned with undeserved bad fortune; comedy, Golden reasons, will evoke pain at undeserved good fortune, indignation, which Aristotle explicitly says is most opposed to pity (*Rhet.* 1386b9). However, whereas Golden regards indignation itself to be of central

[36] But for the possibility that Aristotle may have admitted some pain and destruction into the comic, see Heath 1989: 352-3.

[37] We also cannot know whether Aristotle had in mind a particular play (e.g. Alexis's *Orestes*?); cf. Halliwell 1998: 272, n. 28.

importance, I suggest instead that the cluster of emotions with which it is associated are as or more important, especially the pleasurable ones.

As mentioned earlier, indignation is a painful emotion, but there are pleasurable ones connected to it. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes a series of emotions related to evaluations of others' characters and fortunes, including pity and indignation (1385b13-88b28).[38] He explains that people who are inclined to feel pity are also inclined to feel indignation (1386b10-16), as well as certain other emotions that are not given distinct names (1386b25-87a3). These associated emotions are: 1) pleasure at deserved suffering, which I termed above 'justified schadenfreude' (1386b26-30) and 2) pleasure at deserved good fortune, which I shall term 'justified gratulation' (1386b30-1).[39] The 'just deserts' plot may entail activating the painful emotion of indignation, but it does so as part of a process of activating those related pleasurable emotions, justified schadenfreude at the villains' comeuppance and justified gratulation at the heroes' success.[40]

Indignation and its pain need not be particularly keen in the 'just deserts' comedy and can be elicited to varying degrees. Perhaps they are keen near the end of the *Clouds*, when Pheidippides beats his father and then uses the sophistry that he has learned at Socrates's school to justify it and escape punishment. One may feel especial indignation at the unjustified success of Socrates and his school, which translates into especial justified schaden-

[38] I discuss here only the good emotions related to indignation and exclude the deviant ones, such as envy and spite, which Aristotle mentions in the *Rhetoric* but which one should not feel in response to drama or otherwise. Cf. n. 15 above. For a fuller discussion of these emotions, see especially Sanders 2008; 2014: 58-78. For the history of the term that Aristotle uses for indignation (τὸ νεμεσᾶν/νέμεσις), see Konstan 2006: 111-28; Kristjánsson (2006: 102) tries to explain Aristotle's different definitions of indignation.

[39] I base this term on Coker (1992), who calls the emotion 'proper gratulation'; Coker follows Stevens 1948.

[40] Aristotle may also hint at such a plot at *Poet.* 1453a1-7, where he rejects the tragic plot in which an especially bad person goes from good fortune to bad: such a story, he says, would have a quality that he calls "philanthropic" (φιλάνθρωπον), but not pity or fear. The interpretation of this term (like so much else in the *Poetics*) has been controversial. One interpretation holds that, like pity, the "philanthropic" is pain at another's suffering, but, unlike pity, it is irrespective of desert (see Konstan 2006: 214-18 for a recent formulation of this view). A second view holds that "philanthropic" refers to moral satisfaction at seeing someone experience deserved suffering. Carey 1988 offers a third view that subsumes the second, that "philanthropic" describes a quality of the plot, not an emotion in the audience, i.e., such a plot is pleasing or satisfying (cf. de Montmollin 1965); this is compatible with the second view in that the plot is pleasing or satisfying precisely because the events satisfy the spectators' moral sense (Carey 1988: 138). If the latter views are correct, then the sense of moral satisfaction that such a plot elicits corresponds to justified schadenfreude, and thus it partly overlaps with the 'just deserts' comedy. On the "philanthropic", see Carey 1988: 133 for earlier bibliography.

freude at their subsequent ruin and gratulation at Strepsiades's triumph. But in a play like the *Acharnians* Lamachus's unjustified good fortune is hardly belaboured. Dicaeopolis does complain about Lamachus's unjustified good fortune, but he also puts one over on the general at their first meeting, and Dicaeopolis continues to abuse Lamachus, largely through the conspicuous display of his own good fortune, right up until the end of the play, when Lamachus dies. While the *Acharnians* does evoke indignation, clearly it is more oriented towards eliciting justified schadenfreude and gratulation throughout the play. In comedies like the *Clouds* and the *Acharnians*, these emotions are elicited, of course, because justified schadenfreude and gratulation are pleasurable in themselves, but also because such pleasurable emotions will dispose one to feeling the laughter emotion.

The second plot, the 'enemies reconciled' comedy, has a rather different emotional profile. In both the 'just deserts' plot and tragedy, the spectators' emotions are based on evaluations about whether characters' good and bad fortunes are deserved. The 'enemies reconciled' plot may well involve activating indignation, justified schadenfreude, and justified gratulation to varying degrees throughout the play, but, when he describes its ending, Aristotle makes no reference to desert. As far as the bad characters are concerned, desert is ultimately irrelevant. Aristotle's comment that in such a play "nobody kills anybody" contrasts with the end of the *Odyssey*, where the bad outcome for the bad characters is their deaths at the hands of the good; in the comic plot, I take this to be a hyperbolic expression of the idea that nobody really suffers at the end of the play. If there are good and bad characters (and Aristotle does not say that there are) then, in the end, one will not feel justified schadenfreude, since the bad do not come to a bad end.

Aristotle's description of the 'enemies reconciled' comedy instead emphasizes the changeable emotions of the characters in the play. The principal characters are the worst of enemies (ἔχθιστοι). The emotion that they feel towards each other is not, in Aristotle's terminology, anger, although it may have begun as such. It is hatred, a deep-seated emotion that is differentiated from anger in that the one who feels it does not feel pain, nor does he want his enemy to suffer; he simply wants the enemy to cease to exist.[41] But, by the end of the play, the characters instead express friendship (φιλία) and perhaps calmness (πραότης), the contraries of hatred and anger (*Rhet.* 1380a5-

[41] By Aristotle's definition, anger is felt at a particular slight committed by someone who had no cause to give a slight (*Rhet.* 1378a31-3). Bitter enemies, however, do have cause to slight each other (and harm one another otherwise), and their hatred is not tied to individual offenses. For the distinction between anger and hatred and the possibility of the latter arising from the former, see *Rhet.* 1382a1-15. On the painlessness of hatred, see above, with n. 20.

1381b37).[42] But here it is important to observe the disjunction between the emotions of the spectator and the incidents onstage; one will not necessarily respond in the same way as the characters. That they would abandon such deep-seated hatred – in the case of Orestes and Aegisthus, the product of a long-standing familial feud driven by murder, cannibalism, adultery, and other grievous injuries – is perhaps a marker of their inconsistency and would qualify as ugliness or error.[43] Such ugliness and error are, of course, grounds for the laughter emotion.

If my analysis of these two comic plots is correct, then Aristotle's conception of the catharsis of comedy is distinct from the catharsis of tragedy in an important way. As Janko has suggested, comedy seems, on the whole and in the end, to elicit pleasurable emotions, chief among which is the laughter emotion. The 'enemies reconciled' comedy evidently focuses on that emotion in particular. But the 'just deserts' comedy rouses a painful emotion as a basic part of the process of rousing pleasurable ones. If tragedy does only or mainly engage with emotions that are painful, comedy may, in Aristotle's analysis, cover a wider emotional terrain than tragedy.

But the emotions of the 'just deserts' comedy are also connected to the tragic emotions in an important way. The emotions that Aristotle singles out for tragedy, namely pity and fear, are, of course, intertwined; one fears for oneself things that arouse pity when they happen to another (*Rhet.* 1382b26-7; 1386a27-8).[44] As I have noted, pity is also entwined with the emotions of the 'just deserts' comedy, namely indignation, justified schadenfreude, and justified gratulation. Indeed, in the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle conflates them all under the term 'indignation' (νέμεσις), and the man who is disposed to them is the indignant man (νεμεσητικός). There, these four virtuous emotions correspond to a single virtuous disposition.[45] Thus the emotions of

[42] On calmness, see especially Konstan (2006: 77-90), who refers to it as satisfaction and suggests an interpretation of it as a "pleasurable response to a gesture that enhances one's status"; on friendship, see Konstan 2006: 167-84. This plot contrasts with tragedy in an interesting way. Aristotle says that tragic plots in which the conflict occurs amid friendships (ἐν φιλίαις) elicit pity in a way that conflicts between enemies do not (*Poet.* 1453b14-22); in the 'enemies reconciled' plot, however, the conflicts are between enemies, but conclude in friendship.

[43] Cf. Heath (1989: 352, n. 35), who notes that Orestes reconciling with Aegisthus would certainly seem ugly or shameful (αἰσχρόν) to a Greek audience. On inconsistency of character, see *Poet.* 1454a26-8, where Aristotle allows for the possibility of consistent inconsistency.

[44] On tragic pity and fear in Aristotle and their relationship to each other, see especially Halliwell 1998: 168-84; 2002: 217-30; Konstan 2005; Munteanu 2012: 70-103.

[45] *Eud. Eth.* 1233b23-6. On the conflation of the four emotions, see Coker 1992, who argues that in this passage νέμεσις must more precisely be a virtuous disposition that is constituted from the four virtuous dispositions associated with the four emotions.

tragedy and the 'just deserts' comedy form a closely related family of emotions. According to my interpretation, the catharsis of comedy complements the catharsis of tragedy.

3. What Were the Other Catharseis of Comedy?

Antiquity gives us not one but many catharseis, some of which are elaborations on, responses to, or distortions of Aristotle's.[46] Of the surviving notices, several leave one with little hope of recovering a theory of the comic catharsis, Aristotelian or otherwise. For example, the sixth-century Neoplatonist Olympiodorus claims in his commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades* to know of five varieties of catharsis (all of which, he says, can already be found in Plato!); he attributes one of these to Aristotle (6.6-7.8), but goes on to call it "Peripatetic or Stoic" (54.15-55.11) and then "Aristotelian" (145.12-146.11). Olympiodorus himself seems uncertain about the provenance of the theory, and he says little that can help us here: he does not mention comedy, tragedy, or, for that matter, music generally.[47] In this section, I shall examine three post-Aristotelian sources that explicitly mention a comic catharsis and consider in each case the nature of their accounts generally and how they may relate to Aristotle's in particular.

a) Comic Catharsis in the *Tractatus Coislinianus*

The *Tractatus* is well known because it may or may not derive from an epitome of the second lost book of the *Poetics*. The affirmative case has been argued most (in)famously by Janko; most scholars have remained sceptical but agree that there is heavy Peripatetic influence.[48] For our purposes, the passage where the *Tractatus* describes the catharsis of comedy is of chief importance (*TC* IV)[49]:

[46] For catharsis as a concept prior and up to the time of Aristotle, see the collection of essays in Vöhler and Seidensticker 2007; for a broad survey of catharsis after Aristotle, see Sorabji 2000: 288-300. Fortenbaugh (2003: 106; 2005: 374-5) holds that Theophrastus had a doctrine of comic catharsis that followed Aristotle's. This may be true, but I am afraid that little can be made of it.

[47] Janko (2011) gives this fragment as fr. †75 and excludes it from Aristotle's *On Poets*. See as well Sorabji 2000: 297-300; Heath 2013: 14.

[48] Janko 1984, a book "widely admired and disbelieved" (Heath 1989: 344, n. 1). Most recently, Watson (2012) has built on Janko's work by showing how the *Tractatus* comports with Aristotelian philosophy generally. For the case *contra*, see especially Nesselrath 1990: 102-49. Janko 2001 surveys the reactions to his thesis and answers many criticisms.

[49] I use the numbering in Janko 1984.

> κωμῳδία ἐστὶ μίμησις πράξεως γελοίας . . . δι' ἡδονῆς καὶ γέλωτος περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν. ἔχει δὲ μητέρα τὸν γέλωτα.
>
> [Comedy is a representation of a laughable action . . . effecting through pleasure and laughter the catharsis of such emotions. It has laughter as its mother.]

The collocation of laughter and pleasure is rather jarring and has been much criticized.[50] By "laughter" we may understand the laughter emotion; "pleasure", however, is not an emotion, but it can be a sensation that attends certain emotions. Janko has argued that the *Tractatus* has joined an emotion and its genus: "pleasure" refers to the emotions that are accompanied by pleasure.[51] To the extent that the *Tractatus* connects comedy to the laughter emotion and suggests that the emotions of comedy are (at least in the end) pleasurable, it comports with the comic catharsis I sketched above. Yet, unlike the catharsis I described, the *Tractatus* does not allow for the possibility of painful emotions such as indignation. Indeed, even if "pleasure" here refers to the range of emotions that are, on balance, pleasurable, the *Tractatus* focuses exclusively on the importance of laughter and says nothing explicitly about other pleasurable emotions. Laughter – and not pleasure – is called the mother of comedy; in contrast, pain (meaning, according to Janko, the range of painful emotions) is the mother of tragedy.

But the author of the *Tractatus* has clearly simplified the views of Aristotle, or of whatever Peripatetic he did use for these passages. While the *Tractatus* calls laughter the mother of comedy, it hints that there are other relevant emotions. It says that there should be a due measure (συμμετρία) of fear in tragedy, just as there should be a due measure of the laughable in comedy (*TC* IX), and it concludes by dividing comedy into three categories, comedy that is excessive in laughter, comedy that tends towards the serious, and comedy that is a mixture of both types, which is the mean between the other two and presumably the optimal form (*TC* XVIII). Thus despite the prominence given laughter, and despite not naming any other emotions, the *Tractatus* does imply that there are other emotions in comedy. The question is how they relate to laughter and what they might be.

The principle is clearly that the emotions both for comedy and for tragedy must somehow be balanced. In the case of the idea that there should be a "due measure" of fear in tragedy, Bernays supposed that the *Tractatus* was reflecting an observation that Aristotle makes in the *Rhetoric* that ex-

[50] Thus Bernays (1880: 144) complains expressively that, on inspection, one finds the definition of comedy in the *Tractatus* to be a "Kohlenschatz . . . eine jämmerlich ungeschickte Travestie".

[51] Janko 1984: 156-61; 1987: 161-2; 1992: 351; cf. the parallel at *Nic. Eth.* 1105b25. For the observation that the emotions cannot, however, be strictly divided into the pleasurable and painful, see above.

cessive fear drives out pity (1385b32-4; 1386a21-4).[52] This interpretation is, I think, correct. In the case of comedy, Bernays thought that the *Tractatus* was expressing the idea that laughter – which he interprets as malicious mockery ("vernichtendes Hohngelächter", Bernays 1880: 151) – must be balanced with a more innocent pleasure.[53] This interpretation is, I think, not correct. If the *Tractatus* is a refraction of Aristotle or a theory of comedy that derives from Aristotle, then that distinction does not ring true: Aristotle nowhere expresses concern about the maliciousness of laughter in comedy.[54] Moreover, if laughter at the ugliness and error of the inferior characters of comedy is malicious, justified schadenfreude is malicious, too; but, I have argued, it is one of the few emotions that can be identified in Aristotle's treatment of comedy. In any case, whatever its relation to Aristotle, the end of the *Tractatus*, which distinguishes among comedy with an excess of the laughable, comedy that inclines towards the serious, and comedy that mixes both, shows that the balance is to be not between malicious laughter and innocent pleasure, but between the laughable and the serious.

For the emotions and catharsis of comedy, the *Tractatus* must mean that the laughter emotion must be balanced against other pleasurable emotions that are serious.[55] But, while by "serious" it may mean not-laughable, the distinction does not mean that serious emotions are opposed to the laughable. Fear and pity are related and compatible, but an excess of the former comes at the expense of the latter, and the *Tractatus* evidently recommends a balance. The underlying idea may well be that the laughter emotion must be balanced against other pleasurable emotions like schadenfreude and gratulation, which are compatible with the laughter emotion but not necessarily themselves productive of laughter. Their related emotion, indignation, is, of course, neither pleasurable nor laughable, but the emphasis may be on the cumulative sensation involved (pleasure), rather than on the emotions leading up to it.

A comedy that has an excess of laughter will, therefore, be one that elicits

[52] Bernays 1880: 142. Contrast Watson (2012: 158-63), who offers a different conception of "due measure" in tragedy (and catharsis generally: see 141-76, 179-82), according to which fear is balanced with non-fearful emotions that may be pleasurable.

[53] Cf. Smith 1928: 155 (identifying the emotions of comedy as "innocent mirth" and "malicious fun, or ridicule"); Janko 1984: 144-60, 211-12, also suggesting that "due measure" refers to the emotional balance afforded by catharsis. For scepticism that this phrase is Aristotelian, see Heath 2013: 15.

[54] This is true both of the laughter that arises at the characters in comedy, but also of laughter at real individuals outside of the play (i.e. personal abuse). See Heath 1989 for the argument that certain forms of personal abuse are fully compatible with Aristotle's views on mimesis.

[55] Watson (2012: 194-6) offers a similar interpretation.

the laughter emotion above all else. A form of the 'enemies reconciled' plot that Aristotle mentions, wherein the mortal enemies Aegisthus and Orestes end up as friends, may be an example: the change in attitudes may be very funny, but it comes at the expense of other pleasurable emotions, such as schadenfreude. A comedy that has an excess of serious emotions perhaps would be a form of the 'just deserts' plot that focuses on actions that produce indignation, gratulation, and schadenfreude at the expense of the laughable. In the most extreme form, it may even admit ruin and destruction (which Aristotle says are beyond the ambit of the laughable) and thus be indistinguishable from Aristotle's second-best tragedy.

b) Comic Catharsis in Iamblichus

The Neoplatonist Iamblichus, writing in the late third or early fourth century, mentions a catharsis of tragedy and comedy that has occasionally been connected to Aristotle.[56] Iamblichus explains that our emotional faculties become more violent by being contained, but, when exercised a little, they may be purified (ἀποκαθαιρόμεναι) and cease. He describes the process thus (*On the Mysteries* 1.11):

> διὰ δὴ τοῦτο ἔν τε κωμῳδίᾳ καὶ τραγῳδίᾳ ἀλλότρια πάθη θεωροῦντες ἴσταμεν τὰ οἰκεῖα πάθη καὶ μετριώτερα ἀπεργαζόμεθα καὶ ἀποκαθαίρομεν· ἔν τε τοῖς ἱεροῖς θεάμασί τισι καὶ ἀκούσμασι τῶν αἰσχρῶν ἀπολυόμεθα τῆς ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων ἀπ' αὐτῶν συμπιπτούσης βλάβης.
>
> [For this reason, by watching the emotions of others in comedy and tragedy, we settle our own emotions, make them more moderate, and purify them. Also, at sacred rites, by seeing and hearing shameful things, we are freed from the harm that comes about from them in action.]

Iamblichus's catharsis, like Aristotle's, is effected through mimesis and operates homeopathically on the emotions. But there are important differences; Iamblichus's catharsis is either a revision of Aristotle's or comes from another source. His view on the emotions reflects Plato's, namely that they need to be kept in check. His view of the emotional experience of mimesis likewise reflects Plato, and in particular the model that Socrates espouses when bringing the "greatest accusation" against poetry in book 10 of the *Republic* (thus Janko 2011: 520; Belfiore 1992: 284). There, Socrates, first discussing tragedy and the tragic emotions, explains that there is a part of us kept in check by force that yearns to weep for our own misfortunes. According to his account, we satisfy our desire to feel pity (and, in Plato's view, improperly cultivate

[56] Iamblichus *On the Mysteries* 1.11; Janko gives this as *On Poets* fr. 55 (= 81b Rose). See Janko 2011: 519-20 for commentary. For scepticism of its reliance on Aristotle, see Lord 1982: 176, n. 54; Belfiore 1992: 281-7; Heath 2013: 15.

it) not simply because we see the undeserved suffering of others in tragedy and pity them – we allow ourselves to grieve for the characters precisely because we watch the characters themselves grieve (*Rep.* 605c9-d6; 606a3-b10).[57] Likewise, in comedy, a repressed part of us desires to joke around, and this part is satisfied (and improperly cultivated) by seeing comic characters actualize their own desires to joke around (*Rep.* 606c2-10). Aristotle does not draw so direct a connection between the emotions of the characters and the emotions of the audience, particularly in the case of comedy.[58] His discussion emphasizes distance: comedy is a mimesis of people inferior to us, and the laughable is based on their ugliness and errors. In the case of the 'enemies reconciled' comedy, I suggested that the emotional effect of the end of the play on the spectators derives precisely from the fact that the characters' emotions seem inappropriately changeable (e.g. the mortal hatred of Aegisthus and Orestes becomes friendship).

As a consequence, Iamblichus's comic catharsis is quite different from Aristotle's. For Aristotle, the emotions in comedy arise from the same cognitive processes that give rise to the emotions in ordinary life. This is the very reason why catharsis is salutary: emotions are conditioned to be such that they are exercised correctly outside the theatre. But for Iamblichus the emotions of the spectators correspond to the emotions of the characters of comedy. The spectators yearn to do and say shameful things, just as the characters yearn to do and say shameful things in comedy; the spectators' desires are satisfied vicariously by seeing the characters in comedy fulfill their own desires. Iamblichus's catharsis is a reversal of Plato's pronouncement about the effects of such emotional identification. Plato says that watching comic characters indulge in buffoonery will lead a spectator to satisfy his desire to act like a buffoon in everyday life. Iamblichus says that watching comic characters indulge in buffoonery will, for a time, satisfy the spectator's desire to act like a buffoon so that he does not act thus in everyday life. His catharsis is a wish-fulfillment fantasy that will (for a time) exorcise the wish.

c) Comic Catharsis in Proclus

The last comic catharsis that I shall discuss is adduced by another Neoplatonist, Proclus, who was influenced by Iamblichus.[59] In his *Commentary on*

[57] On Plato's charges against tragedy in the *Republic*, see especially Halliwell 2002: 72-117; on tragic pity and fear in Plato, see Munteanu 2012: 52-69. But in this context, see as well Belfiore 1992: 283, noting that Iamblichus is above all concerned with shameless actions and emotions and that, in the case of tragedy, he may not even be concerned with pity and fear, but, say, the desire to commit parricide or incest.

[58] See Munteanu 2012: 141-237, on the relation between the spectators' emotions and the emotions internal to tragedy.

[59] Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, vol. 1: 42, 49-50 Kroll; Janko gives part of

Plato's Republic, he first describes a principle that sounds very much like Aristotle's catharsis: the emotions should be satisfied in a balanced fashion and kept tractable for education. Yet Proclus goes on to reject this principle. He argues that spectators, especially youths, develop characters that are similar to the characters of comedy and tragedy and that, when watching drama, emotions are elicited in an immoderate way that precludes any kind of catharsis. The consequence is that comedy rouses a love of pleasure in the impressionable spectator and leads him to inappropriate laughter. For Proclus, there is no catharsis afforded by comedy; comedy is a disease that infects one's character. The catharsis of the comic emotions does not come from comedy.

He instead suggests "expiations" (ἀφοσιώσεις) that consist of restrained activities with a "small resemblance" (σμικρὰν ὁμοιότητα) to what is purged, but he does not explain what precisely he means. Elizabeth Belfiore has suggested that Proclus has in mind a catharsis that is not homeopathic (1992: 287-8). Yet this is not necessarily true; the means of Proclus's expiation have a small resemblance, not none. They may resemble the comic emotions in type, but be small in magnitude. His specific criticisms of the cathartic faculty of comedy are, after all, that the characters of comedy are too varied and that comedy rouses the emotions immoderately. His solution may be that an emotion should be expiated by arousing the same emotion in a carefully controlled, moderate way (the Pythagoreans had a catharsis of precisely this type, and perhaps Proclus has it in mind).[60] This could mean, for example, that the laughter emotion can be purged by means of laughing at a small, tasteful joke, rather than a full comic performance.[61]

By my count, I have adduced four comic catharseis. The first was Aristotle's, which, I argued, works not only on the pleasurable emotions like the laughter emotion, justified schadenfreude, and justified gratulation, but also on the painful emotion of indignation. It seems quite probable that he had other pleasurable (and perhaps painful) emotions in mind, but there is too little evidence to say. The second catharsis appears in the *Tractatus*, whose description privileges laughter in particular, but hints at other emotions; it

these as *On Poets* fr. 56 (= 81a Rose). For commentary, see Janko 2011: 520-1. For scepticism about the relation to Aristotle's doctrine, see Lord 1982: 176, n. 54; Belfiore 1992: 285-7; Heath 2013: 16-17.

[60] The principle is that one is given just a little taste of the emotion that is to undergo catharsis; see Olympiodorus *Commentary on Plato's Alcibiades* 6.11-14; 55.1-5; 145.20-146.2.

[61] If Belfiore is correct, then Proclus's catharsis must be neither homeopathic nor allopathic; Proclus may then have in mind the idea, expressed in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, that certain emotions that are related but not the same can drive each other out (e.g. excessive fear precludes pity; anger is incompatible with fear; etc.).

can and perhaps should be folded into Aristotle's account. The third was Iamblichus's, who may take the idea of a comic catharsis from Aristotle, but who transforms it into purgation because of his Platonic conception of mimesis and the emotions. The fourth was the catharsis of Proclus, which purges the emotions that are associated with comedy without using comedy at all. As I promised in the beginning, the enterprise of reconstructing these catharseis must be both speculative, given the paucity and ambiguity of the evidence, and somewhat ghoulish, requiring, as it does, the dissection and reassembly of so many theories.

But, as messy as the enterprise is, catharsis should be of the utmost interest to scholars of ancient comedy, as well as scholars of comedy generally. It is, as I have said, perhaps intuitive that tragedy affords catharsis and exerts some sort of meaningful effect on the emotions. This is less obvious about comedy, and the sketchy evidence that I have discussed here is so important precisely because it offers a way of thinking about comedy that is foreign to most ancient scholarship. Most ancient scholars who were concerned with comedy's effects on spectators and society focused very narrowly on the ethics of laughter and were preoccupied with the effects, whether salutary or deleterious, of joking. Indeed, some trace the origins of comedy to mockery, and the conventional periodization of ancient comedy ties the different phases of comedy to the different kinds of abuse: in Old Comedy, crooked politicians and generals were explicitly made fun of; in Middle, the same were mocked more obliquely; and in New, character types became the objects of laughter.[62] Such an approach was popular, but it seems very deficient. The essence of comedy becomes joking, and the main effects of comedy become punishment and deterrence.

The ethics of joking are, of course, important. Aristotle knew this well.[63] But the force of comedy cannot be reduced to the ethical force of laughter. Aristotle (like Plato and his successors) also knew well that comedy, no less than tragedy, produces real emotional responses. These emotional responses are easy to pass over because they are often accompanied by laughter, but they may well have real effects on our emotional faculties, either immediately or over time. A theory of comic catharsis tries to engage with this problem by explaining what rousing those emotions does to the psychology of the individual (this will, of course, have ethical implications, and others too). The endeavor of reconstructing and thinking about the comic catharsis may be speculative, messy, and ghoulish, and my own reconstructions may soon be buried with so many others. But the speculation is necessary: we

[62] Nesselrath (1990: 28-45) offers the best survey of these sources and their provenance; see as well Csapo 2000 for general discussion.

[63] See, e.g. *Nic. Eth.* 1127b33-28b9.

cannot move forward without it, and the matter is too important to let alone. Reconstructing the comic catharsis means confronting on a basic level the question of how comedy changes us.

Abbreviations

CAG (1882-1909), *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, edita consilio et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Regiae Borussicae, 23 vols, Berlin: Reimer.

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