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IN THE *Poetics* OF ARISTOTLE, the term *φιλάνθρωπον* stands close behind *ἀμαρτία* and *κάθαρσις* among the problematical words and concepts which have attracted the most extensive study and comment. The importance of *φιλανθρωπία* in the moral and esthetic world of Menander has been emphasized by T. B. L. Webster, among others,¹ and the passage in Plutarch's *Table Talk* discussed below (711f–712d), where the word occurs in the context of a comparison of Aristophanes and Menander, has been remarked upon by those concerned with the influence and appreciation of Menander.² What I hope to add is simply a clearer articulation of the shift in dramatic taste between the time of Sophocles and Aristophanes and that of Menander, and of the role of *φιλανθρωπία* in that shift. I shall argue that the apparent absence of what the fourth century was to call *τὸ φιλάνθρωπον* in fifth-century theater and what I take to be its rejection in the prescriptive portions of the *Poetics* have far-reaching implications for the esthetics of the drama of the classical period, and that the positive valuation of *φιλανθρωπία* in New Comedy is a crucially important element, one which sets New Comedy in reaction against the theory and practice of earlier theater.

It is not my intention to offer a new resolution of the problems connected with *τὸ φιλάνθρωπον* in the *Poetics*, but rather to move from Aristotle's use of the term in his discussion of the tragic plot, by way of some conjectural remarks on the typical patterns of the plots of Old Comedy, to a brief discussion of the relevance of the term to the esthetics of Menander. It will, however, be necessary to review briefly the three instances of *φιλάνθρωπον* in the *Poetics* as well as the positions on its meaning taken by earlier scholars.

The term *φιλάνθρωπον* in Aristotle's *Poetics* seems to designate one of two

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¹B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind* (tr. Cambridge, Mass. 1953) 251–254; W. Schmid, "Menanders Dyskolos und die Timonlegende," *RhM* N.F. 102 (1959) 167; T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Menander* (Manchester 1950) 206–207.

²See, for instance, F. Quadlbauer, "Die Dichter der griechischen Komödie im literarischen Urteil der Antike," *WS* 73 (1960) 68.

things: (1) the general sense of poetic justice which leads us to want goodness rewarded and badness punished, or (2) a vague niceness or sympathy, the *Vorstufe* of *ἔλεος* according to Gudeman and Stark,³ but distinct from *ἔλεος* in that it is neither circumscribed and defined by moral judgment nor, consequently, restricted to that suffering which is undeserved. This is essentially the formulation of Else (*ad* 1452b28–53a7), who opts for the second alternative against the “poetic justice” theory of Twining, Zeller, Susemihl, Rostagni, and Butcher, among others.⁴ Else’s position involves rejection of parts of 1456a, but there are other reasons as well for finding that passage contradictory and problematical, as we shall see.

In the first passage from the *Poetics* in which the term *φιλόανθρωπον* occurs (1452b–53a), the plot involving the success of a bad person is described as *ἀτραγωδία* . . . *πάντων*, having neither *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον*, nor *τὸ ἐλεεινόν*, nor *τὸ φοβερόν*, and that involving the misfortune of a bad person is likewise rejected, on the grounds that it possesses the first of these three qualities, but neither of the others.⁵ No examples are given of a plot type which has both *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον* and the properly tragic qualities—none, that is, except the one in the final passage in which the term occurs (1456a) where certain poets are said to create plots characterized by both *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον* and *τὸ τραγικόν*, plots in which devious or criminal characters endowed with some redeeming positive quality are defeated.⁶ This seems to refer to essentially the type of plot rejected in 1452b34 ff. as possessing *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον* *without* *ἔλεος* or *φόβος*, and therefore constituting something distinct from tragedy. I conclude with some other recent commentators and scholars that this passage is in contradiction with the earlier ones and

³A. Gudeman, *Aristoteles ΠΕΡΙ ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΗΣ* (Berlin 1934) 239–240 (*ad* 1452b38), followed by R. Stark, *Aristotelesstudien*² (Munich 1972) 98.

⁴G. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics: the Argument* (Cambridge, Mass. 1957) 366–370. D. W. Lucas, *Aristotle: Poetics* (Oxford 1968) 142, gives a balanced view of the problem in his note *ad* 1452b38.

⁵1452b34–53a7 (in the definition of the preferred tragic plot, Bywater’s translation): “(1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious (*μιαρόν*) to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it has no one of the requisites of Tragedy (*οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔχει ὧν δεῖ*); it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears (*οὔτε γὰρ φιλόανθρωπον οὔτε ἐλεεινόν οὔτε φοβερόν ἐστίν*). Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us (*τὸ μὲν γὰρ φιλόανθρωπον ἔχει ἂν*), but it will not move us either to pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves.”

⁶1456a19–23 (Bywater): “Yet in their Peripeties, as also in their simple plots, the poets I mean show a wonderful skill in aiming at the kind of effect they desire—a tragic situation that arouses the human feeling in one (*τραγικὸν γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ φιλόανθρωπον*), like the clever villain (e.g., Sisyphos) deceived, or the brave wrongdoer worsted.”

therefore cannot constitute a basis on which to incorporate a positive valuation of τὸ φιλόανθρωπον into Aristotle's esthetics of drama.⁷

What, then, is the relationship between τὸ φιλόανθρωπον and the tragic in Aristotle's mind? When Aristotle designates the best type of tragic plot, he does so by establishing a mean between two extreme types. What interests us here about that mean is that Aristotle specifically suggests deviation from it in the direction of the extreme type of plot in which the good protagonist goes from good to bad fortune—a plot described in its pure form as neither φοβερόν nor ἐλεεινόν but μισαρόν, "disgusting," "inspiring revulsion," the opposite emotion from τὸ φιλόανθρωπον according to Stark and others.⁸ Whether τὸ φιλόανθρωπον, then, is a sense of poetic justice or simply a general sympathy with human suffering, it is the antithesis of the tragic, to the extent that the tragic approaches the limit of the μισαρόν.

Most commentators, including D. W. Lucas,⁹ have taken a different position. Lucas admits τὸ φιλόανθρωπον as a "desirable element" in tragedy in Aristotle's view, though one "less important" than pity and fear. This position depends on the list of "necessaries" (ὧν δεῖ) in 1452b38, which includes the qualities of being φιλόανθρωπον, ἐλεεινόν, and φοβερόν. Yet if it is truly Aristotle's position that φιλόανθρωπον deserves a place in this list, why does he not discuss it at length with the other two elements? At most, I would suggest, φιλόανθρωπον belongs in this list only as a concession to contemporary (bad) taste. It is a quality, Aristotle recognizes, that *some* might place in the list of ὧν δεῖ, and although he does not deign to discuss it as a genuinely important element in the esthetics of tragedy, he is not

⁷Among the recent commentaries, D. W. Lucas *ad* 1456a21–22 does not refuse to believe that the two adjectives τραγικόν and φιλόανθρωπον might describe the "desired effect" of a single play, but in 1456a22 he suspects "that a lacuna conceals a change in the type of play being discussed" ([above, n. 4] 192), while Else, citing Gudeman, rejects the phrase τραγικόν γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ φιλόανθρωπον as a marginal note bespeaking "a concept of poetic justice which is distinctly Platonic, if not Christian" ([above, n. 4] 548). Commentators before Gudeman in general accept the integrity of the passage and explain the apparent contradiction with 1452b34 ff. by postulating a second (and inferior) set of goals for tragedy, beyond ἔλεος and φόβος. See, for example, I. Bywater *ad loc.* (*Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* [Oxford 1909] 254).

⁸Stark (above, n. 3) 108; cf. Else (above, n. 4) 368. The compromise or mean is established as follows: the protagonist should be neither wholly good nor wholly bad (1453a7–10), but should fall on the "good" side of the true mean (1453a16–17), and his progress should be from good to bad fortune (1453a14–15). Oedipus is Aristotle's first example, and if, with most modern readers, we maintain the radical innocence of Oedipus, the example serves well to illustrate my point (which I believe also to be Aristotle's). Indeed, Aristotle gives us no sure basis for distinguishing between the extreme type in which a good man goes from good to bad fortune, and the ideal type, where a better-than-average man goes from good to bad fortune.

⁹(Above, n. 4) 142.

averse to citing it to support his point here. He is saying, in effect, "No matter *how* you look at the plot type in question, it fulfils neither the true requirements for tragedy nor any of the obvious other requirements which might be applied by popular taste."

Even without the meaning "characterized by poetic justice" for *φιλόανθρωπον*, these passages underline the radical separation Aristotle maintains between moral and esthetic demands. The best tragedy inspires pity and fear by battering the expectations of the audience, by refusing the imagination any comfortable refuge, be it moral satisfaction or warm-hearted sympathy. On the contrary, tragedy moves on the margin of the sphere of the utterly monstrous, the morally repulsive. The risk of beauty, Aristotle implies, lies here. The surviving tragedies Aristotle most admired confirm this, as does his definition of *ἔλεος* as the emotion inspired by *unjust, undeserved* suffering.

We know nothing of what Aristotle may have said about the best comic plot, but the field has been explored on the level of conjecture by Bernays and then by Lane Cooper.¹⁰ It is my belief that (as Cooper argued) Aristotle would have defined the comic plot as a mirror image of the tragic plot—something very close to the *ἀτραγωδοτάτον πάντων* of *Poetics* 13—and in line with the usage of Aristophanes.¹¹ The central myth would be that of the undeserved success of the comically grotesque, inferior protagonist—not altogether depraved any more than the tragic protagonist doomed to failure is altogether morally good. The short-circuiting of *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον* is maintained: moral satisfaction, poetic justice are flamboyantly denied, and the possibility of a warm sympathy is utterly eliminated—now to be replaced not by pity and fear but by laughter. Even if our conjectural attribution of this formula to Aristotle is wrong, it corresponds remarkably well to the surviving plays of Aristophanes.

When Aristotle has described the double plot (that in which poetic justice is most completely realized through the failure of the bad and the success of the good) and stated that, although popular, it does not deserve acceptance as a basis for tragedy, he goes on to remark that "this sort of pleasure," though inappropriate to tragedy, is appropriate to comedy.¹² This observation has led to the belief that Aristotle thought "poetic justice" appropriate to comedy

¹⁰J. Bernays, *Zwei Abhandlungen über der aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, 2: *Ergänzung zu Aristoteles' Poetik* (Berlin 1880); L. Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy* (Oxford 1924).

¹¹Cooper (above, n. 10) 195–200.

¹²1453a30–36 (following the definition of the preferred tragic plot, Bywater's translation): "After this comes the construction of Plot which some rank first, one with a double story (like the *Odyssey*) and an opposite issue for the good and bad personages. It is ranked as first only through the weakness of the audiences (*διὰ τὴν τῶν θεάτρων ἀσθένειαν*); the poets merely follow their public, writing as its wishes dictate. But the pleasure here is not that of Tragedy. It belongs rather to Comedy"

but not to tragedy. There is a certain truth to this position, but only, I shall suggest, a limited one. What Aristotle seems to have in mind here is the pleasure to be derived from Old- and Middle-Comedy scenes of a particular and familiar type. After the initial success of the insane scheme of the protagonist, the consequences of that triumph are explored in a series of short episodes. The pattern is repeated from the *Acharnians* to the *Plutus* and indeed there is little change in the cast of characters. *Sykophantai* are thrashed, the pretentious but less actively malicious (including pompous poets and superfluous priests) are deflated but in general treated to less radical punishment for their sins; and the deserving, should they happen along, are occasionally rewarded, though usually with an obscene or otherwise humorous implication. Even here, the patterns are often reversed to the extent that the deserving or at least inoffensive may be rewarded with slapstick thrashings. These scenes as a whole, however, support Aristotle's observation and I would suggest that they also provide an adequate explanation of the thrust of that remark.¹³ However, if we consider the larger myths of surviving Old and Middle Comedy (in a way Aristotle seems to promise he will do but never does), we are struck by a persistent pattern which is just the opposite of satisfying, and whose effect is far from the "pleasure" Aristotle seems to be saying is appropriate to comedy. This pattern is in fact the plot Aristotle called the ἀτραγωδότατον πάντων, the triumph of evil, or (making the bathetic leap from the tragic villain into the sphere of comedy and of comic "inferiority"), the triumph of the hustler or the jerk, the Pisthetairos or the Trygaios.

It is impossible to demonstrate conclusively that, for Aristotle, τὸ φιλόανθρωπον would be precisely the emotion or emotional stance of those whose taste he saw undermining drama (ἡ τῶν θεάτρων ἀσθένεια 1453a34)—the weakness that demanded "happy endings." Nevertheless, the two seem to be related, or rather to work toward the same end. If τὸ φιλόανθρωπον is characteristic of plots in which bad people go from good to bad fortune

¹³Unless, like R. G. Ussher ("Old Comedy and 'Character': Some Comments," *G&R* 2nd Ser. 24 [1977] 71–79), we reject the possibilities (1) that Aristotle was a sympathetic and sensitive reader of Aristophanes, and (2) that the plots and characters of Aristophanes must somehow have been accounted for in Aristotle's esthetics of drama, we must postulate some point at which Aristotle's theory and Aristophanes' practice meet. It is clear that the protagonists of Aristophanes' surviving plays do not deserve their success; Aristotle indeed prepares us for this by indicating that comedy portrays inferior people. Unless it is the intention of Aristotle in 1453a35–36 to condemn all the comedies before his own time which happen to have reached us as not offering that pleasure "proper to comedy," some alternative explanation must be sought. The typical scenes to which I refer here, and which I suggest may be adequate to explain the thrust of Aristotle's remark, are present in the majority of the surviving plays and do indeed depend on the principle of poetic justice—taking that for the moment to be what Aristotle is talking about—and reintroduce that principle immediately *after* the climax of the play (i.e., after the absurd and undeserved triumph of the inferior protagonist).

(and specifically and emphatically absent from plots in which bad people succeed), then we can say that, to the extent that it is defined here, it *may* be expressed as a demand for "poetic justice," although the concept need not be inherent in or inseparable from τὸ φιλόανθρωπον.¹⁴

There seems to be little doubt that in the time of Menander φιλόανθρωπος had taken on a new or enriched meaning and had come to mean "nice" or "sympathetic" in an almost cloying sense. The shift of meaning and of valuation of the concept is all the more striking when we consider that Menander's first play was produced in 321, the year after the death of Aristotle. Still, we are clearly dealing here with a change which must have occurred over a generation, between the composition of the *Poetics* and the height of Menander's career in the last years of the century. Glancing back to fifth-century drama, we find that the word is nearly absent, occurring in tragedy only in *Prometheus Bound* where Kratos uses it to refer (contemptuously) to Prometheus' philanthropy. The single instance in Aristophanes (*Peace* 392) belongs to the same range of meaning: philanthropy in fifth-century drama refers to a benign attitude toward man on the part of a god.

In the remains of Menander, the word occurs a half-dozen times and refers consistently to a human emotion or attitude. There is no need to examine this material in detail here, but I have listed the more revealing instances below, to indicate that, first of all, φιλανθρωπία and justice go hand in hand, and secondly, that φιλόανθρωπος in the vocabulary of Menander represents the antithesis of that other characteristically Menandrian adjective δύσκολος.¹⁵ In fact, when Pyrrhias describes his frustrated

¹⁴Else maintains that the plot in which a good person is destroyed is also, by implication, endowed with τὸ φιλόανθρωπον, basing his argument on the οὔτε which introduces the concept in 1452b38 ([above, n. 4] 369). I find this argument unconvincing, though it must be admitted that nothing in Aristotle's limited use of the term contradicts it. The later use of the term, however, as we shall see below, suggests that sympathy for the undeserved failure of a good person should not be included simply because, as Plutarch indicates, plots characterized by the *success* of the deserving, rather than their failure, are "schools of philanthropy."

¹⁵

χάριν δικαίαν καὶ φιλόανθρωπον, πᾶτερ,
αἰτῶ σε ταύτην. εἰ δέ μή, σὺ μὲν βία
πράξεις ἃ βούλει· τὴν δ' ἐμὴν ἐγὼ τύχην
πειράσομ' ὥς δεῖ μὴ μετ' αἰσχύνῃς φέρειν.

(Pap. Didot 1.41-44, Körte-Thierfelder 1.144)

δύναται τὸ πλουτεῖν καὶ φιλανθρώπους ποιεῖν.

(Fr. 19 K-T)

τὸ μηθέν ἀδικεῖν καὶ φιλανθρώπους ποιεῖ.

(Fr. 398 K-T)

τοῦμὸν θυγάτριον· πάνν γάρ ἐστι τῇ φύσει
... φιλόανθρωπον τὸ παιδάριον σφόδρα.

(Fr. 361 K-T)

attempt to deal honestly and openly with Knemon in the *Dyskolos*, he insists that he set out to be *φιλόανθρωπος* and *ἐπιδέξιος* (105–106) only to find himself in the presence of someone embodying just the opposite qualities.¹⁶

None of these passages demonstrates conclusively a connection between *φιλανθρωπία* and happy endings (or poetic justice) and it is only in a much later text, the praise of Menander from Plutarch's *Table Talk*, that the connection can be made. Still, these snippets from New Comedy do demonstrate that to be *φιλόανθρωπος* in Menander's imagination is to be concerned with right, with justice, with the way things *should* be, if only men acted as they should. Two of the aphorisms of Menander serve to illustrate the principle at work here, both in Menander's theater and in that of his imitators:

βίου δικαίου γίγνεται τέλος καλόν.

(Sent. 108 Jaekel)

βίος πονηρὸς εἰς κακὸν φέρει τέλος.

(Sent. 128)

Whatever the role of *φιλανθρωπία* here, Menander's fundamental sense of right and wrong is clearly bound up in an unfailing providence guaranteeing justice in human affairs. Bildad the Shuhite and the other friends of Job could not have affirmed providence more naively or with less of a glance at the realities of human experience. And the plays, as we know, illustrated what the aphorisms preached.

In the passage of Plutarch where Menander's praises are sung (*Quaest. conu.* 711 f.), the adjective *φιλόανθρωπος* occurs twice, and the surrounding argument makes it clear that *φιλανθρωπία* as *humanitas*, as a gentle, tolerant, and open sympathy for all suffering—and most of all for that of young lovers confronted with obstacles to their love—is here bound up with the demand for a plot in which poetic justice is accomplished.¹⁷ The admirer of Menander calls the playwright a teacher of *φιλανθρωπία*

¹⁶The antithetical status of *φιλόανθρωπος* and *δύσκολος* seems clear here, though Pyrrhias may be saying simply that he set out to be "sociable and tactful" and encountered an antisocial grouch. It is also incidentally true, however, that this errand was in the service of facilitating the inevitable happy ending and the union of the young couple.

¹⁷12c–d (in Diogenianos' praise of Menander): ". . . and when virgins are seduced it usually ends in marriage. Moreover, in affairs with *hetairai*, if the woman is bold and aggressive, these affairs are cut short by some sort of coming-to-his-senses or change of heart on the part of the young man, but if the girl is good and returns the young man's love, then a legitimate father is discovered for her or at least a certain amount of time is allowed them for their love-affair, an indulgence of conscience which is generous and humane (*συμπεριφορὰν αἰδοῦς ἔχων φιλόανθρωπον*). All this may be too trivial for men involved with other things, but in the context of a symposium I would not be surprised if the grace and charm of our author should have the effect of molding and perfecting behavior and morals in the direction of nobility and humaneness (*ἀμα καὶ πλάσιν τινὰ καὶ κατακόσμησιν ἐπιφέρει συνεξομοιοῦσαν τὰ ἦθη τοῖς ἐπικεικῇσι καὶ φιλανθρώποις*)."

specifically *because* he portrays virtue (or, more generally, the deserving) rewarded. In Menander, *φιλανθρωπία* overrides severer moral positions and governs the outcome of the action while it conditions the audience's response to that outcome. That Plutarch has his admirer of Menander use specifically Menandrian vocabulary is not fortuitous. Whether or not a high valuation of *φιλανθρωπία* had a necessary connection in Menander's own mind with plots in which virtue—broadly understood—is rewarded (and vice, should it prove ineradicable, presumably punished), his later admirers *thought* it did, and they may well have been correct. This passage from Plutarch recalls Zero Mostel's simultaneously sentimental and ironic line in Martin Ritt's film *The Front*: "It's nice when nice happens to somebody nice." Here, however, Plutarch's speaker takes us one step further, and says in effect, "It's nice when nice happens to somebody nice—and if *you're* nice, it will make you *nicer* to hear about things like that."

In summary, Plutarch's dramatized praise of Menander suggests that poetic justice is indeed an element in *φιλανθρωπία*, and this late assessment may well reflect the much earlier shift in taste during the fourth century, which itself marks a fundamental difference between fifth- and late fourth-century theater, on the level of the relationship of moral to esthetic demands.

By postulating the central importance of a typical tragic myth (the disaster that befalls an essentially worthy man) and a typical comic myth (the success of an essentially unworthy man), it is possible to bring the evidence of the surviving fifth-century plays and of Aristotle's incomplete account of the esthetics of drama into harmony. Viewed from this perspective, the major theater of the fifth century would appear to have depended for its dramatic impact on the inversion of poetic justice and the denial of the satisfaction of the audience's "real-life" emotional and moral demands. Even if we are unable to be certain of the meaning of the term *φιλόανθρωπον* in Aristotle (or indeed whether it belongs in his *Poetics* at all),¹⁸ we can see that when it came to represent a central and highly valued concept in Menander, and later in the language of those who admired Menander's drama, it represented the final destruction of the kind of theater on which Aristotle had based his account, and a radical shift in the esthetic demands of theatrical audiences. The audiences of Sophocles and Aristoph-

¹⁸This possibility haunts Stark's essay (above, n. 3); see esp. 105–108. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that the whole idea of *φιλανθρωπία* has been imported into the *Poetics* by a later hand (perhaps very soon after its composition), but Stark is undoubtedly right to conclude that, in the absence of clear information on just what we *have* in this text (i.e., lecture notes, perhaps elaborated, or a finished essay, perhaps surviving only in part), we must accept the obligation to try to explain what we have as best we can, and must avoid the temptation to banish that which we find incongruous.

anes were satisfied when they were shocked, outraged—whether for tragic or comic effect. The denial of a generous sympathy toward the characters and action, as well as the denial of their moral expectations, was central to their experience of theater. This seems to me to be true on the evidence of the plays themselves, and I have attempted to show that it is not incompatible with the *Poetics*, though given the very real difficulties in understanding the thrust of the relevant passages, Aristotle must be admitted to be a questionable witness to this shift of taste.

Aristotle's own position was, of course, intermediary, but I would argue that his esthetics of drama (like many other aspects of his thought, including his politics) were essentially backward-looking. The generation after his death saw the end of the sort of drama I believe he admired, that in which virtue is tragically destroyed or vice comically triumphant. It was replaced by a drama with just the opposite characteristics. The basic formula of New Comedy—the one Aristotle saw *undermining* the drama of his own day—might well have been congenial to Aristotle on the level of ethical thought. Still, Aristotle (unlike Plato) was able to maintain a clear-headed separation between ethics and esthetics, and even if, as T. B. L. Webster argued, Menander's school of philanthropy spread the ethical ideas of the Peripatetics,¹⁹ I believe their master would have seen those plays as something fundamentally alien to the dramatic values he prized.

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¹⁹(Above, n. 1) 217.