XXVII. The System of Aristotle's *Poetics*

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I mean to indicate by the title of this paper that the central problems of the *Poetics*, such as the "tragic flaw" or *hamartia*, the ideal hero, the purpose of drama, catharsis, etc., are all interrelated, that they form a system of thought. This is perhaps not an entirely novel suggestion, but in the past interpreters have tended to focus their attention on these difficulties more or less in isolation from one another. The reasons for this will appear in detail, I hope, in the course of my analysis. In brief, while much attention has been expended on the generic classification of drama as "imitation," little has been given to what I believe is a much more fruitful line of investigation, namely, the fact that drama for Aristotle is specifically an imitation of action.[1] His

[1] "Action" as a term used in the *Poetics* is discussed by S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (New York 1951) 123, 334–7; but he makes no attempt to relate it to the various problems I have mentioned. In discussing Unity of Action Butcher (*ibid.* 275–6) gets closer to a correct view of the matter, especially his statement: "Within the single and complete action which constitutes the unity of a tragedy, the successive incidents are connected together by an inward and causal bond—by the law of necessary and probable sequence on which Aristotle is never tired of insisting." But he fails to see what the causal bond is that makes action a unity. A. Gudeman, *Aristoteles, Peri poiêtikês* (Berlin and Leipzig 1934); I. Bywater, *Aristotle: On the Art of Poetry* (Oxford 1909), and A. Rostagni, *Aristotele: Poetica* (Turin 1945) make little use of this important concept. Hereafter each of the above works will be cited under the author's name alone.

A recent book by Humphry House, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London 1956), has some very good remarks on the interdependence of character and action; see Lecture V, "The Relation of Character and Plot." But House too fails to see the full implications of Aristotle's view that drama is an action (*praxis*), particularly so in the case of *hamartia*. A common error is that made by R. McKeon, "The Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," in *Critics and Criticism* (Chicago 1957) 133, where he says, "The object of imitation is the actions of men." Aristotle does use *praxis* in the plural; but when he is careful, as in the formal definition of tragedy, he speaks of "action," not "actions." This may seem quibbling but, as I shall try to show, the solution for many of these vexing problems of the *Poetics* depends upon our seeing why Aristotle so insistently demands that drama be a unity of action (*Poet.* 1451A.32) and what it is in his concept of action that can make it a unity. The use of the plural "actions" in English implies something like scenes, which is not what Aristotle intended.

For a bibliography of recent work on the *Poetics* see Gerald F. Else, "A Survey of Work on Aristotle's Poetics, 1940–1954," *CW* 48 (1954–5) 73–82; Else's book, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge 1957), did not appear until after the completion of my paper.

thinking on action, while implicit in the *Poetics*, is to be found explained in detail only in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This Aristotelian concept of action (*praxis*) proves to be the key to the solution of many of the vexing problems of the *Poetics*. Aristotle tells us repeatedly (*Poet.* 1449B.24, 36; 1450A.3, 16, 23, 38; 1450B.2, 24; 1451A.31; 1454A.18) that drama is an action, i.e. a representation of an action. This is the very nature of drama. There should be nothing strange in this mode of analysis: if drama is action, then the conclusion is inescapable that the characteristics of drama are to be explained in terms of what it is. This is something of a new approach to the traditional difficulties of the *Poetics*, but one, I think, that leads us out of the present *impasse* of set and hardened ways of looking at the *Poetics*. One further point: an examination of Greek tragedy itself, whatever other benefits we may derive from it, helps us very little in solving these interpretational problems of the *Poetics*. Aristotle was so dominated by his own philosophic concepts, particularly that of action, that he was unable to see drama in any other light than that of his own philosophy.

In the analysis of Aristotle's system of thought on drama I propose to take up first the problem of *hamartia* which, in spite of some difficulties, is not actually a very thorny problem. At least, it seems fairly certain what it *can* mean in Aristotle, and I will try to extend this to show what it *does* mean in the *Poetics*. Enough, and perhaps more than enough, research has been expended on the meaning of this word and other forms of the same stem in Aristotle and Greek drama.[2] The general result of this research is that *hamartia* can mean both what we would call a miscalculation and a moral fault. I have generally no quarrel with all of this if the purport of such research is only that *hamartia* in various contexts can have these meanings, but to determine more precisely its meaning in the *Poetics* requires a more systematic approach. Now, we cannot know exactly what *hamartia* is—for it is in some sense a cause of action—until we know what Aristotle meant by action (*praxis*). To begin with, *praxis* technically (I do not deny that Aristotle uses the word sometimes in a

[2] O. Hey, "*Hamartia*," *Philologus* 83 (1927–8) 1–17, 137–63; Butcher, 317–33; Bywater, 215 *ad* 1453A.10; Gudeman, 242 *ad* 1453A.7; P. W. Harsh, "*Hamartia* Again," *TAPA* 76(1945) 47–58; S. M. Pitcher, "Aristotle's Just and Good Heroes," *PhQ* 24 (1945) 2; I. M. Glanville, "Tragic Error," *CQ* 43 (1949) 49–53.

more general sense) is not just any kind of act: it is not "art" or "production" of any kind (*Eth. Nic.* 1140A.1–17), nor is it the kind of activity, e.g. mathematics, whose pursuit is simply the truth or falsity of a matter (*ibid.* 1139A.27 ff.). It will be noticed that these two classes of activity are from the ethical point of view "indifferents." Aristotle tells us quite precisely in the *Nicomachean Ethics* what he means by human action; the passage (1139A.31–1139B.5) is so important that I would like to quote the whole of it—in fact, in essence, the whole explication of what Aristotle means by saying that drama is a representation of action, i.e. life,[3] is contained in it:

πράξεως μὲν οὖν ἀρχὴ προαίρεσις—ὅθεν ἡ κίνησις ἀλλ' οὐχ οὗ ἕνεκα—προαιρέσεως δὲ ὄρεξις καὶ λόγος ὁ ἕνεκά τινος. διὸ οὔτ' ἄνευ νοῦ καὶ διανοίας οὔτ' ἄνευ ἠθικῆς ἐστιν ἕξεως ἡ προαίρεσις· εὐπραξία γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον ἐν πράξει ἄνευ διανοίας καὶ ἤθους οὐκ ἔστιν. διάνοια δ' αὐτὴ οὐθὲν κινεῖ, ἀλλ' ἡ ἕνεκά του καὶ πρακτική· αὕτη γὰρ καὶ τῆς ποιητικῆς ἄρχει· ἕνεκα γάρ του ποιεῖ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν, καὶ οὐ τέλος ἁπλῶς—ἀλλὰ πρός τι καί τινος—τὸ ποιητόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ πρακτόν· ἡ γὰρ εὐπραξία τέλος, ἡ δ' ὄρεξις τούτου. διὸ ἢ ὀρεκτικὸς νοῦς ἡ προαίρεσις ἢ ὄρεξις διανοητική, καὶ ἡ τοιαύτη ἀρχὴ ἄνθρωπος.

This is the conception of action and of man's life, which is in this sense an action, and therefore the conception of drama and plot and related matters which dominates the *Poetics*. For example, *Poetics* 1450A.1 tells us: *πέφυκεν αἰτία δύο τῶν πράξεων εἶναι, διάνοιαν καὶ ἦθος, καὶ κατὰ ταύτας καὶ τυγχάνουσι καὶ ἀποτυγχάνουσι πάντες.*[4] The Aristotelian term for the Efficient

[3] *Poet.* 1450A.16–7: codd., *ἡ γὰρ τραγῳδία μίμησίς ἐστιν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεως καὶ βίου καὶ εὐδαιμονίας καὶ ἡ κακοδαιμονία ἐν πράξει*; Margoliouth (see the *apparatus criticus* in Butcher) has suggested from the Arabic version: . . . *ἀλλὰ πράξεως καὶ βίου, ⟨ὁ δὲ βίος⟩ ἐν πράξει*; *alii alia*—but in any case the essential meaning is the same.

[4] It will be noted in this passage that *êthos* rather than *orexis* is paired with *dianoia*; but Aristotle is thinking about drama in this passage rather than psychology. However, even in the previously quoted passage, *Eth. Nic.* 1139A.31–1139B.5, *hexis êthikê* and *êthos* are both used where we might expect *orexis*. We should remember that in Aristotle "moral virtue" which, in distinction from "intellectual virtue," is the only virtue of importance in action and consequently in drama, is a *hexis proairetikê* (*ibid.* 1106B.36) and that *proaeresis* (of which more later) is an *orexis bouleutikê* (*ibid.* 1113A.10). Since this type of *orexis* forms moral character (*êthos*), the two become in a way convertible terms. Similarly, in the passage quoted from the *Poetics*, *dianoia* should strictly be qualified, as he uses it elsewhere: e.g. *ἡ ἕνεκά του διάνοια* or *διάνοια ἡ πρακτική*. Also such equivalents as *λόγος ὁ ἕνεκά τινος, νοῦς ὁ ἕνεκά του, νοῦς ὁ πρακτικός* imply the "desiderative" nature of the thought just as in his use of *orexis* as a cause of *proaeresis* the influence of *nous* is implied. Cf. *ibid.* 1139A.18–22, where we

Cause of action is *proaeresis*; its double nature is admirably indicated in the passage quoted from the *Nicomachean Ethics*: depending on which aspect you wish to stress you may call it *orektikos nous* or *orexis dianoêtikê*; and this is man himself as the Efficient Cause of his own actions and consequently of his happiness or unhappiness. That is, the motive power for good or bad action lies within man himself, and generally speaking there is no room for accidental or outside agency in this view.[5] *Proaeresis*, which is made up of *nous* and *orexis*, is not only the cause of action but it is *proaeresis* that forms man's moral character.[6] This is simply a more technical way of stating Aristotle's famous axiom that we become just by acting justly. The point I want to stress is the complete interdependence of action and morality in Aristotle's thinking.[7] The inner cause of action (i.e. *proaeresis*, somewhere close to English "will" but not "choice"—perhaps "moral intention" is closest) and the completion or Final Cause of action, i.e. happiness or unhappiness (or, more appropriate for drama, success or failure) are all capable of evaluation in moral terms. Drama for Aristotle is the action or story of a passage (*metabasis*) from happiness to unhappiness or vice versa (1451A.13f; cf. 1450A.17; 1452A.16–21).[8]

see that *nous* and *orexis* have similar functions. For the way in which each is a cause of action see *De an.* 433A.9 ff.

I might add that the close functional association of *nous* and *orexis*, or *dianoia* and *êthos*, which together are covered by the technical term *proaeresis*, is founded on the nature of that part of the soul in Aristotelian psychology that is both rational and irrational (*ibid.* 1102B.13 ff.). This part is different, on the one hand, from the "nutritive" part which man shares with the animals and the purely rational part in the proper sense which is a godlike thing that few if any humans have absolutely. I have added this comment because it is very important in our consideration of his view of drama, in considering, for instance, what he means by a "good" man and a "bad" man and the "one in between," who is his ideal hero.

[5] According to Aristotle there are of course no absolute statements to be made in ethics; in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he does consider the sphere of chance (e.g. 1100A.8, the case of Priam) but I hope to show that this plays an even less important role in his theory of drama than in his ethics.

[6] *Ibid.* 1112A.1; cf. the statement from the dramatist's point of view (1450B.8; 1454A.17–9).

[7] *Eth. Nic.* 1111B.33; cf. *Poetics* 1449B.36 ff. We should ask ourselves why Aristotle thinks of drama typically as an action and as men in action rather than as a representation of heroic deeds or great suffering or the like. The answer, as I hope to make clear, is that *proaeresis* makes clear the moral motivation of the action, and only in this way does drama in his view make sense; in fact, it would otherwise not be drama at all.

[8] Aristotle says at 1450A.17 (see above, note 3, for the textual difficulty) that our life, its happiness and unhappiness, is found in action. Why not in the power of the

Now, when we ask ourselves how *hamartia* (i.e. the cause of a passage from happiness to unhappiness) fits in with Aristotle's concept of action and drama, the answer is obviously that it is of the same nature as all other motivation of action and, leading as it does to unhappiness, i.e. the tragic end, it can only be understood in moral terms. Briefly stated, there are only two exceptions to moral responsibility[9] for one's deeds: (1) acts done under outside compulsion—but this can never be action in Aristotle's sense, where the origin is found in the person himself—and (2) action done in ignorance of particulars, i.e. sheer accident. The full scheme of harmful acts will be found at *Eth. Nic.* 1135B.16–25. In this passage we find what looks like a fourfold classification: (1) *atychêma*, (2) *hamartêma*, (3) *adikêma*, and (4) *adikêma ek proaireseôs*—for the last three of which the agent is morally responsible. But it will be noticed that there is a certain looseness in Aristotle's use of terms here. He uses the term *adikêma* for two classes, and links the words *tauta gar blaptontes kai hamartanontes adikousi* which apply to the immediately foregoing acts of natural

gods, in suffering, in the passions, in accident, or the like? This is why for Aristotle there is no such thing as a drama of man struggling with fate or the gods. Aristotle was so dominated by his own ethical philosophy that he could not conceive of any other kind of drama. Those who (cf. Gudeman 242, quoting Wilamowitz) adduce the *Oedipus* as an example of the non-moral nature of *hamartia* in the *Poetics* are simply founding their argument on Aristotle's misunderstanding of Sophocles. Sophocles wrote a play concerning man's relation with deity. But Aristotle did not think in these terms.

[9] The basic distinction is the voluntary or involuntary nature of an act (*Eth. Nic.* 1135A.19). Acts can of course in themselves be just or unjust without involving the intention of the agent at all; the good man or the bad man may indifferently perform such acts. But these acts are just or unjust only *kata symbebêkos* (*ibid.* 1135A.17). Aristotle always has in mind the intention, or moral purpose (*proaeresis*), of the agent. *Proaeresis* is not simple appetition, which is voluntary too, but belongs to a higher moral order—in the sense that it may also belong to a higher immoral order. Children have no part in *proaeresis* (*ibid.* 1111B.9), though their acts may be nonetheless reprehensible; but the hardened criminal and the sage both act from *proaeresis*: the one bad, the other good. It is important to see this distinction because upon this is based the type of fault *hamartia* is and, further, the specific quality of tragic pity. Those who have made *hamartia* a mistake, i.e. sheer accident, or an "intellectural error"—whatever that would mean in Aristotelian psychology (cf. *ibid.* 1111A.34)—have ignored all this. This is the fundamental mistake made by Hey; cf. L. Cooper, *Aristotelian Papers* (Cornell 1939), 146, note 13. The determinative of right conduct is *orthos logos*, but this does not mean that it is simply an intellectual matter; it may be of a purely "practical" sort in production but not in action which issues in success or failure; cf. *ibid.* 1139A.34: εὐπραξία γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον ἐν πράξει ἄνευ διανοίας καὶ ἤθους οὐκ ἔστιν. This applies especially to drama which is a passage from happiness to unhappiness or vice versa.

passion, classed under *adikêma*. That is, as far as the terminology goes, Aristotle can interchange *hamartêma* and *adikêma*; in a looser fashion yet he uses *hamartêma* for *atychêma* (*ibid.* 1135B.12), a passage often used (e.g. Bywater, 215) to "prove" that *hamartia* is simple mistake, but such a passage is of little use by itself out of the context of Aristotle's thought. As the passage referred to in the *Ethics* makes clear, Aristotle is always careful to distinguish isolated acts of wrongdoing from deliberate acts of wrongdoing: *adikousi men . . . ou mentoi pô adikoi dia tauta* (the psychological reason for this is given at *ibid.* 1114B.30 ff.). It is only acts done from a fixed *proaeresis* that show a man to be *adikos* (*ibid.* 1136A.1). The more proper term for reprehensible acts, though not done by a person with a fixed disposition towards evil, is *hamartêma*. Different from both is an act committed in ignorance of particulars, *atychêma*. Thus Aristotle is really thinking in terms of a threefold classification: (1) wrongful acts of sheer accident for which there is no responsibility, (2) wrongful acts which, however, do not proceed from a fixed immoral disposition, and (3) wrongful acts that do proceed from a fixed immoral disposition. Aristotle gives an admirable statement of this threefold scheme in the *Rhetoric*, 1374B.5:

. . . τὸ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ τὰ ἀδικήματα μὴ τοῦ ἴσου ἀξιοῦν, μηδὲ τὰ ἀτυχήματα· ἔστι δ' ἀτυχήματα μὲν ὅσα παράλογα καὶ μὴ ἀπὸ πονηρίας, ἁμαρτήματα δὲ ὅσα μὴ παράλογα καὶ μὴ ἀπὸ πονηρίας, ἀδικήματα δὲ ὅσα μήτε παράλογα ἀπὸ πονηρίας τ' ἐστίν.

This is the scheme of harmful acts that is typically Aristotelian and the one that is in his mind in the *Poetics*, though the full demonstration of this may wait for our consideration of plot-type, the ideal hero, and the concept of pity. Concerning the moral or non-moral nature of *hamartia*, however, I think my analysis brings to bear considerable light on this subject. A common error is that made by Gudeman, for example, who says (Gudeman, 241 *ad* 1453A.7):

Denn wenn auch hier mit einer Deutlichkeit, die nichts zu wünschen übrig lässt, zwei sittliche Begriffe wie *kakia* und *mochthêria* der *megalê hamartia*, auf welcher der Glückswechsel des Helden nach A. beruht, gegenübergestellt werden, hat man letzterem Worte unentwegt den Sinn eines sittlichen Delikts untergeschoben.

Gudeman's error here is a really crucial one for the interpretation of *hamartia*. He fails to see that *kakia* in the passage he is referring to in the *Poetics* has the same technical meaning that it has in the passages just cited from the *Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*. That *hamartia* does not mean "a disposition of deliberate wickedness" (*kakia*) does not mean that it has no connotation of depravity at all. For instance, the passage *Eth. Nic.* 1111A.1: *en toutois* (i.e. mistakes committed in ignorance of particulars) *eleos kai syngnômê* is often cited (Rostagni, 71) in proof of the non-moral nature of *hamartia*. Of course we pity and forgive such mistakes (i.e. *atychêmata*), whereas we do not forgive deliberate wickedness. But I shall try to show that, if we understand Aristotle's thinking on these problems correctly, wrongdoing of the class of *hamartia* is just the type of wrongdoing which is pitied and forgiven in the proper tragic sense. Further, this understanding of *hamartia* satisfies his other requirements (e.g. that of plot-type) which obviously the meaning of simple mistake given to *harmartia* does not. Thus in my analysis I have not answered the old question of the ethical or non-ethical nature of *hamartia* by simply deciding for one or the other; but by attacking the question from the point of view of what is the nature of drama for Aristotle, viz. action, and by considering the moral nature of all action in his philosophy, I have tried to define specifically in what way *hamartia* is an ethical concept. This is, *hamartia* is neither a simple unmotivated mistake nor is it deliberate, intentional wickedness but the fault corresponding to that moral condition wherein a person, in Aristotelian terms, is not yet wicked but does wicked things. Any fair reading of the *Ethics* must recognize this as Aristotle's typical way of thinking about moral types; nor can it escape notice that this person who commits wrongs but has no fixed immoral disposition corresponds rather to the average man, in an ethical sense, than to either extreme.

Having determined the nature of Aristotle's conception of action and its application to the problem of *hamartia*, we may consider what Aristotle means by the "necessary or probable" and what bearing this has on *hamartia*. One of the main emphases of the *Poetics*, if not the chief one (1450B.23; 1451A.16 ff.), is Aristotle's constant insistence upon unity of plot or action. The plot is made a unity by the necessary or probable nature of the separate events of the whole. Aristotle insists over and over that the events

of the drama, its beginning, middle and end, must obey the law of the necessary or probable, must spring by inner motivation from the plot.[10] We should be aware, though more will be said of this later, that the reason, the Final Cause, for the requirement of unity of action is the production of the "proper pleasure" of drama (1459A.17–21). In this sense plot is the soul or life of drama (1450A.38). Now, if we ask ourselves what is it that makes the structure of dramatic plot necessary or probable, the answer must be the nature of action in Aristotle's conception where acts proceeding from a certain moral type of *proaeresis*, or *proaereses*, will necessarily or probably lead to the type of end corresponding to that *proaeresis*. Outside of sheer accident—about which there is nothing necessary or probable—there is no other Aristotelian concept of man's life, of his happiness and unhappiness.[11]

In this connection Aristotle has himself, I am afraid, been the cause of some confusion. Immediately after his discussion of the unity of plot in chapter 8 he begins chapter 9 with the words: "It is clear from what has been said . . ." Then he proceeds to draw his famous distinction between the proper function of the poet and the historian: namely, that the poet is more concerned with *ta katholou*, the historian with *ta kath' hekaston*; and, therefore, he concludes that poetry is more "philosophic and serious" than history. Here again, the failure to see these remarks in the context of the thought has led to the serious misconception that the requirement of necessity or probability and, in fact, the general aim of dramatic art are for the purpose of expressing "the universal." Butcher, for example, one of the chief proponents of this view,[12] says (Butcher, 191):

Poetry in striving to give universal form to its own creations reveals higher truth than history, and on that account is nearer to philosophy.

[10] The idea of the necessary or probable nature of the inner motivation of drama is expressed in the *Poetics* in a variety of terms: *cf.* 1451A.13: 1451B.13; 1454B.6; 1454A.37; 1455A.16.

[11] Cf. Butcher, 166; Butcher is of course quite correct in saying that "The rule of 'probability' as also that of 'necessity' refers rather to the inner law which secures the cohesion of the parts." But this does not really say very much. The important point is what makes the events necessary or probable, what is the inner law. House (above, note 1) 60 is at least aware that this is a problem; he decides that it is numerical probability. But this takes no account of the nature of action.

[12] Cf. also Rostagni, lxxvi-vii: "La regola poi del verisimile o del necessario . . . è prima di tutto . . . un principio di logica formale." But this is ambiguous. Drama is not a science. He fails to explain in what sense it is "logical."

But though it has a philosophic character it is not philosophy: "It *tends* to express the universal." . . . (p. 192): The aim of poetry is to represent the universal through the particular, to give a concrete and living embodiment of universal truth.

Against this view there is, first of all, the objection that Butcher's statement fails completely to demonstrate the *differentiae* between philosophy and drama. Moreover, those who maintain that in Aristotle's view the aim of drama is to embody the universal ignore a passage that expressly states the contrary. *Poetics* 1451B.29 tells us: "Even if the poet should write of actual events, he is none the less a poet." This passage shows that there is no absolutely necessary line of demarcation between poet and historian in this respect at least.[13] We must never lose sight of Aristotle's central concept that drama is an action. When he says that the hero progresses by necessary or probable steps to happiness or unhappiness (1451A.13), and when he says that the requirement of the necessary or probable should be employed in the moral representation[14] of the characters as well as in the action, he has in mind making the action understandable on the basis of the cause of action, *proaeresis*, which is always in the background of his thinking about action and drama. This comprises the inner law of the drama because it is the inner law of action. And it is in this way too that drama embodies the universal: drama must have a necessary beginning and end, and in this way all the events that make up the drama must be necessarily or probably related. But this state of affairs is not found as a rule in history or everyday

[13] One could compare 1451B.15; but here Aristotle has made the mistake of assuming the historical actuality of Greek tragic *personae*.

[14] *Poet.* 1454A.33: χρὴ δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἤθεσιν ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων συστάσει ἀεὶ ζητεῖν ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ τὸ εἰκός. Bywater (43) translates *êthesin* here as "characters," i.e. the *dramatis personae*, but this is misleading. Even when Aristotle uses the word in the singular of one particular person, he has in mind, not what we would call the "personality" of the person, but rather his "morality" (1460A.10) and especially the way this fits in with, and shows, the action. When Aristotle says (1454A.28) that the representation of the character of Menelaus by Euripides is needlessly bad, the point is not that Menelaus should not be represented as wicked but that the representation of his wickedness should contribute to, and make clear, the action or story.

It must be kept in mind that morality in drama is not necessarily the same thing as the moral motivation. As a blanket requirement Aristotle wants the moral representation of the characters to be good (*chrêsta*, 1454A.17)—and we shall see why this is so—but he immediately makes clear in what sense he means this by adding that the *proaeresis*, or moral "direction," good or bad, must be made evident, must spring from the action.

life; therefore, the dramatist necessarily chooses the typical, probable or necessary (in the sense of the requirements of the action) so that the events of the play follow each other in a necessary or probable sequence to a necessary end. In this sense drama is more "philosophic and serious" than the actualities of history.

Men, then, are responsible for their own actions, and it is in accordance with their own actions that men are happy or unhappy, succeed or fail (1450A.2), which is Aristotle's concept of the nature of a dramatic story. But the question of just *how* responsible is another matter, and it is on this question that the problems of the precise meaning of *hamartia*, the ideal hero, plot-type, and that of pity largely revolve. In the course of chapter 13 of the *Poetics*, which treats the function of drama, Aristotle discusses the ideal plot, the ideal hero, and *hamartia* together, and rightly so, since they are dependent concepts. It is a mistake to treat them separately. The first and foremost thing to notice about the type of protagonist Aristotle desiderates is that he is *ho metaxu* (1453A.7), i.e. the intermediate moral type. This requirement is necessitaed by the types of plots he expressly prohibits. He eliminates, first of all, the fall of good men (*epieikeis*). This is morally repulsive (*miaron*). Secondly, he eliminates the success of bad men (*mochthêrous*, a synonym of *kakos*). This resembles true tragedy least of all. Finally, he rejects the fall of a bad man. It should be noticed that the first two of the forbidden plots are strictly impossible from the point of view of Aristotle's ethical position that men succeed or fail according to their actions. From his point of view there could be nothing necessary or probable about the events of such plots; they would not compose a unity; in fact, they are not plots or dramas at all in his view, though he includes them as theoretical possibilities. The third of the prohibited types, the fall of a bad man, is a possible type from his view of action—it is morally motivated—but it is eliminated because it does not produce pity and fear. Aristotle tends to use "pity and fear" as a set phrase and, though he attempts to distinguish them psychologically (1453A.4–6), it is apparent from his linking these terms so frequently that he thinks of their effect as closely joined.[15]

[15] For a fuller account of Aristotle's view of the psychological nature of pity and fear see *Rhet.* II, ch. 5 (fear) and ch. 8 (pity). Here, too, it will be noticed that their natures are thought of as very similar.

I wish to take up later what Aristotle means by fear in the dramatic sense, but for the present it is sufficient to say that pity is the important aspect of his thought about the best type of plot and hero. Aristotle says (1453A.4): "We experience pity in the case of one who does not deserve his misfortune." That is, we are to feel pity for the ideal hero who is neither a very good nor a very bad man, who comes to unhappiness which he does not deserve through some kind of *hamartia*. This would seem at first glance to contradict all that was said before about the rigid moral motivation of the action. However, it should be noticed—though generally it has not—that Aristotle makes this statement, viz. that pity and fear are not produced, not only of the third type of rejected plot but of the first as well. We can see how this applies to the third type; the fall of a villain is obviously deserved. But what of the fall of a good man? This is eminently a case of "one who does not deserve his misfortune." Yet he says that this does not arouse pity and fear but is morally revolting. It has been opined (Butcher, 309) that our feelings of pity are overcome by our moral repugnance. This may be so in a sense, but the real crux of the problem is the specific meaning to be attached to pity here. For instance, in the case of the fall of a villain we are told that this does not produce pity but *to philanthrôpon*. As with most of the technical terms in the *Poetics*, there is a variety of opinions on its meaning.[16] However, the important thing is to see the scheme of thought in which Aristotle is working, and then the most appropriate translation will suggest itself. At *Poetics* 1456A.21 we are given cases of what is *tragikon kai philanthrôpon*: the frustration of the clever villain and the defeat of a brave but evil man. It is obvious that these examples mean to indicate the feeling we get when we hear or observe something tragic happening to a man who deserves it. That this idea also includes the aspect of feeling sorry for him in some way, however much he may deserve whatever happened to him, is indicated by Aristotle's statement at 1453B.17 where he takes up the question of what kinds of situations give rise to pity. There he says: "If an enemy injures an enemy,

[16] Butcher (303): "sense of justice"; Rostagni (xl): "giustizia"; Gudeman (239), following Galli, defines it, as does Bywater (214), as what may be called human sympathy. Cf. also Finsler, *Platon u. die Aristotelische Poetik* (Leipzig 1900) 123, 126–7; Papanoutsos, "La catharsis des passions d'après Aristote," *Collection de l'Institut français d'Athènes* (1953) 32.

there is nothing pitiable in this, either in his doing it or intending it, except in so far as concerns the deed itself (*kat' auto to pathos*); so, too, if they have no relation to each other." The words *kat' auto to pathos* have the same meaning as *to philanthrôpon* in that they define the same psychological situation. It is the general feeling we have for anyone who suffers what Aristotle calls a *pathos*[17]—a general feeling of sympathy without further qualification. The person may or may not deserve it; as far as concerns *to philanthrôpon*, this is not in question. Now, pity is of the same genus as *to philanthrôpon*—otherwise there is no point in the comparison—but something much more special. Aristotle has indicated the specific *differentia* of pity in his technical sense very clearly. He says (1453B.11): "Since the poet must produce the pleasure deriving from pity and fear through imitation, it is obvious that this result must spring from the action."[18] The important thing to see is that the specific *differentia* of pity in the *Poetics* is that it must be "in the action."[19] Just as Aristotle demands one specific type of plot, one specific type of hero with his special type of flaw, so it is not altogether unreasonable that he should demand one specific type of effect (1452B.33); this he most often calls pity and fear. All this is founded on Aristotle's concept of the nature of action which is his concept of drama. This is what differentiates a "scene of suffering" (*pathos*) from the effect of true tragedy. We may be appalled, frightened, feel sorry, etc., but it is mere sensationalism unless it grows directly in a necessary or probable manner from the plot. This, too, is what differentiates fear in the technical dramatic sense from what he calls "the monstrous" (*to teratôdes*, 1453B.8). That is, pity and

[17] Aristotle defines *pathê* (1452B.11) as scenes of murder, excessive suffering, woundings, etc. This is what he means when he calls the *Iliad* "pathetic" in contrast to the "ethic" *Odyssey* (1459B.14).

[18] For a discussion of this passage see note 32 below; one should in this connection read also the important passage 1452A.36–1452B.2. Here again it will be seen that, for pity and fear and for dramatic pleasure, Discovery and Reversal of Fortune, action or plot is in all cases the specific qualifier. I shall discuss later the important question of the proper pleasure in drama.

[19] Cf. 1453B.1–3. It has been pointed out by Verdenius, "The Meaning of *êthos* and *êthikos* in Aristotle's *Poetics*," *Mnemosyne* 12.4 (1945) 255, that "the *philanthrôpos* feels attracted to his object in a vague manner, whereas pity is based on a moral judgment." This is true enough but the important point is, as Aristotle says, that it is so because it is in the action. This qualification, which makes it pity in the dramatic sense, limits severely any attempt to apply Aristotle's remarks on pity in the *Rhetoric* to this matter in the *Poetics*.

fear are not in drama simply *pathê*; but, as they result from the action and depend upon it, so pity, especially, is not a simple emotion but derives its distinctive character from the fact that it is formed by, and springs from, the necessary or probable sequence of the morally motivated action; that is, pity is understood as well as felt.

As previously mentioned, after rejecting the other plots and their protagonists, Aristotle says that the one remaining, the protagonist to be employed, is *ho metaxu*, the "intermediate" man. This, as we saw, has reference to his moral station. Now, it is interesting and informative to note who this must be in the terminology of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He is obviously the *akratês*[20] (it would perhaps have been awkward for Aristotle to call him "the one in the middle" in the *Ethics*), who occupies a mean position morally between the *enkratês* and the *adikos* or *kakos*. This is based upon the fundamental threefold classification of human moral types.[21] Further, this division will agree very well with the types of wrongdoing which we have already discussed. The good man or *enkratês* (the *epieikês* of the *Poetics*) cannot strictly commit a fault: if he does, it can only be an *atychêma* (of course any class of man can commit an *atychêma*, but the *enkratês* can commit *only* an *atychêma*). The fault of the *akratês* or man of average moral state is the *hamartêma*. The fault of the deliberately bad man (the *kakos*, *mochthêros*, *adikos*, *ponêros*, or *akolastos*) is an *adikêma*. Thus schematically they agree perfectly. However, this in itself would not be a decisive proof; let us test this scheme by applying it to the concepts of *hamartia* and pity. The fundamental difference between the *akratês* and the *kakos* is that the *akratês* acts *para proairesin*[22] in some particular wrongdoing while the *kakos*, or

[20] The term *akratês* should not be translated the "unself-controlled" man, in contrast to the *enkratês* or self-controlled man, but rather the "half-self-controlled" man.

[21] One might argue for a fourfold classification, including the *sôphrôn*. But he, like the Stoic sage, is rather off the human scale, just as the "bestial" and "morbid" types are off the human scale in the other direction (*Eth. Nic.* 1148B.34). There are also further subdivisions of *akrasia* (*ibid.* 1149A.24). Cf. *ibid.* 1151B.34 ff. for the way in which the *sôphrôn* and the *enkratês* differ. In the *Poetics* Aristotle starts with a simple twofold division (1448A.2) but quickly qualifies this with the more Aristotelian threefold division. For the main characteristics of these three types see generally *Eth. Nic.* Book VII, especially 1146B.22, 1147A.14 ff., 1148B.2, 1150A.19 ff., 1150B.29–36, 1152A.4.

[22] That is, he acts in specific circumstances, because of his passions or the like, against his general moral intentions; this must not be thought of as a contradiction

deliberately bad man, acts *kata proairesin* (*Eth. Nic.* 1151A.6). The *enkratês*, or self-controlled man, also acts *kata proairesin*, of course, only in his case the action is a good one. This does not mean that the *akratês* does not have *proaeresis* of any kind—quite the contrary; in fact, that is the point of the distinction: the *akratês* has good intentions (*ibid.* 1152A.16); he is according to his *proaereses* a moral man but does not for various reasons accomplish his good intentions. In a fine comparison Aristotle remarks (*ibid.* 1152A.20) that the *akratês* is like a city that has a good set of laws but never uses them. For the *kakos* or *akolastos*, Wrong Principle has replaced Right Principle, has become the Apparent Good (*ibid.* 1152A.6). The *akratês* is like the *enkratês* in intention but like the *akolastos* in action (*ibid.* 1150B.29 ff.).[23] The *akratês*,

of the statement that *proaeresis* is the cause of action. Our specific acts and our overall moral disposition are voluntary (and so morally accountable) in different ways (*ibid.* 1114B.30)—the typical Aristotelian position.

[23] It is well to bear in mind in discussing the *enkratês*, *akratês*, and *akolastos* that they represent definable points or areas on a continuum rather than rigidly separated divisions. Nor must we suppose that the *akratês* suddenly one day becomes an *akolastos*, or the *enkratês* an *akratês*. However, as a general classification they mark clear enough types in Aristotle's ethics. The thing that it is important to grasp and the thing I want to emphasize is the principle of division. In spite of subclassifications and shadings off of one class into another at times, we have in Aristotle's thought three clearly definable types: (1) the man who knows what is right to do and does it, (2) the man who knows what is right to do and does not do it, and (3) the man who does not know what is right to do and does not do it. Any reading of *Eth. Nic.* Book VII, chs. 1–10, will, I feel, agree with this formulation. I am not concerned here with the provenience of Aristotle's classification, but it is obvious from *ibid.* 1145B.22 ff. that the second type (the *akratês*) is Aristotle's answer to the Platonic *aporia* how a person can know what he should do and yet not do it. The solution (*ibid.* 1147A.32–1147B.3) is an extremely important one for drama and is typically Aristotelian.

In view of the statement in the *Poetics* (1453A.5) that we feel fear in drama for "one like ourselves," it is perhaps worthwhile to consider whether the *akratês* is the average man. It might be thought from such a statement as that of *Eth. Nic.* 1152A.25 that the mean average of human morality lay between the *enkratês* and the *akratês*. However, it is clear from his view of the *enkratês* (cf. *ibid.* 1151B.34) that the average man is hardly such a sturdy moral type but rather that of the *akratês* (*ibid.* 1151A.20–7). Aristotle in common with most ancient philosophers had no very lofty view of the average man (for a particularly strong statement, see *ibid.* 1095B.19). Though in the *Poetics* Aristotle wants protagonists of high station (1453A.10), there is nothing to show that these personages, whatever their station, are other than of average morality in his view (*Eth. Nic.*, *loc. cit.*). For the modern objection that the *personae* of Greek drama are not "like ourselves," see note 28 below. Though in my view the ideal hero of the *Poetics* is the *akratês*, it is undeniable (we will see the reasons for this) that within the area of the *akratês* Aristotle desires to push his ideal hero toward the upper extreme of this area (1454B.9–11).

in short, is *ou praktikos* (*ibid.* 1152A.9). He is thus eminently an object for pity in the true dramatic sense, since he fails to accomplish his good intentions. Pity applies especially, too, in the case of desires that are natural and common (*ibid.* 1149B.4).[24] Thus the eminently good man who does not succumb to his desires (the *enkratês* feels them but does not give in to them, *ibid.* 1152A.3) cannot be an object of pity except accidentally (i.e. *kat' auto to pathos*, for which the dramatic term is *to philanthrôpon*), nor can the very bad man, since he intended to do what he did.[25] We feel sorry for the *akratês* because he knew what he should have done (in a way, that is) and intended to do right but did wrong. We are not to understand by this, however, that the *akratês* is not morally responsible for his actions; for he acts voluntarily.[26] His fault is morally motivated, as is all action leading to happiness or unhappiness; and the agent is responsible for his fault and so must come to grief, but since we know that his intention was good we feel sorry for him.

To sum up just a bit: we now see that *hamartia* is the type of fault that Aristotle's type of hero will have; further, we see that pity in his technical sense is the feeling we will have for this hero's downfall. This is not a simple emotion; it must be "in the action"; thus, in terms of the action or drama, it is understood as well as felt. The ideal hero will have to have some kind of fault if he is to come to a tragic end; this fault must have moral motivation if the drama or action follows Aristotle's concept of action and if the end comes by necessary or probable steps within the action. Yet we must feel pity for the hero's fall (in his specific sense—not *to philanthrôpon*, which we may feel generally for any kind of person). The hero that meets these conditions must necessarily be in a middle state morally. How otherwise can the action be morally motivated and satisfying (*ou miaron*), and yet at the same time how can the hero be an object of pity? No

[24] It is an interesting feature of Aristotle's thinking on these moral types, which may at first surprise us, that the bad man is not particularly distinguished by the severity of his desires and passions—this rather fits the *akratês*—but rather by his disposition toward them; cf. *ibid.* 1148A.17.

[25] *Ibid.* 1146A.3, 1150A.21, 1150B.30. The *akratês* feels sorry for what he has done; so we feel sorry for him.

[26] *Ibid.* 1152A.15: *καὶ ἑκὼν μὲν (τρόπον γάρ τινα εἰδὼς καὶ ὃ ποιεῖ καὶ οὗ ἕνεκα), πονηρὸς δ' οὔ· ἡ γὰρ προαίρεσις ἐπιεικής· ὥστε ἡμιπόνηρος. καὶ οὐκ ἄδικος· οὐ γὰρ ἐπίβουλος.*

one except the *akratês* meets these requirements, and he is, further, in a middle position morally between the *enkratês* and the *adikos*.

From the point of view of this summation let us now consider the supposed contradiction[27] between chapters 13 and 15 of the *Poetics*. Aristotle is said to have eliminated the good men (1452B.34) and then to have demanded that the characters be good (*chrêsta*, 1454A. 17). However, there is no contradiction. It is of course annoying that Aristotle does not further qualify and elaborate his use of terms here; but he gives us, I believe, sufficient indication of his meaning. We have already seen Aristotle's reasons for eliminating very good men from drama. However, this does not mean that they may not be as good as may be (1454A.19). The more noble the *proaeresis* of the hero, the more sympathy, pity, and understanding we will have for him at his fall. This is one of the reasons he admonishes dramatists to imitate good portrait painters by making their subjects better than the average (see note 23, above). This is one of the reasons he wants his heroes to be men of station in life (1453A.10). So some commentators explain, and correctly, the meaning of *chrêsta*. But this is only part of the solution and not the most important part. Doubtless for Aristotle most men of station in Greek drama were also men of generally worthwhile aims[28] in life. When in chapter 15 Aristotle wrote *chrêsta* there was not, I suppose, any conscious distinction in his mind between the meanings "having an eminent station" and "morally good" in the ordinary human sense (i.e. of the protagonist's *proaeresis*).

[27] One type of solution is typified by Rostagni, 69 *ad* 1452B.35: "Quanto ad *epieikeis*, si noti ch'è detto in significato morale soltanto . . . diverso da XV.1454B.13, dove riguarda la *nobilità* che dev' essere in tutti i personaggi tragici." Gudeman, 270 *ad* 1454A.17, takes neither passage in an ethical sense; at least he is consistent. See his reference (*loc. cit.*) to Vahlen's work demonstrating that *chrêstos*, *epieikês*, and *spoudaios* are synonymous. See also C. H. Reeves, "Aristotelian Concept of the Tragic Hero," *AJPh* 73 (1952) 174–83; Bywater, 213 *ad* 1452B.34, says: "It is difficult to reconcile his present view with what he tells us elsewhere of the tragic hero. . . ."

[28] Worthwhile *human* aims of course: the sage's purpose is worthwhile *par excellence*, but this does not come into consideration in Aristotle's view of drama. There is nothing to show that he thought of figures like Oedipus, or even Orestes, as anything (in his moral classification) other than people "like ourselves." The failure to understand this has led to some absurd errors; e.g., M. M. Sharif, *The Nature of Tragedy* (Lahore 1948) 52: "Moreover, the recommendation that the characters should be like ourselves makes the scope of drama too narrow. . . . How many of us are like Medea, Electra, Orestes, Richard III, Macbeth or Iago?" This may or may not be so but does not apply to Aristotle. Aristotle is not concerned with what we call characterization but with character; see B. Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic* (New York 1957) 73.

But quite conceivably there could be men of eminence, Sardanapallus for example, who have no high purposes, who trifle away their lives. For all their eminence they could not be subjects of drama because their lives have no good *proaereses* and consequently no action in the dramatic sense.[29] If they come to a bad end, it is either accidentally or as a result of bad *proaereses*—in either case they are not objects of dramatic pity. Thus it is really the *proaeresis* of the hero that makes the action serious and worthwhile—for drama is not just the representation of an action but of a serious action (1449B.24)—and not simply the eminence of his station, although the two may be closely related. Thus there is no contradiction: in chapter 13 *epieikeis* is used as part of the threefold classification of moral types; *chrêsta* in chapter 15, in its reference to the *dramatis personae*, refers to the good *proaeresis* of the protagonist, as indeed Aristotle immediately makes clear (see note 14, above).

I have purposely left until now the whole nexus of problems centering about the question of what Aristotle thought the end or purpose of drama was and what this has to do with the famous matter of catharsis. What is first in "being" is last in the analysis. Here, if anywhere, there has been an almost total lack of fruitful result. But I, for one, cannot accept Gudeman's *ignoramus et ignorabimus* on this matter (Gudeman, 172). The fault, it may be, is not in Aristotle or the text but in ourselves that we have not found a consistent and satisfying solution to these difficulties. The whole approach in this matter has been vitiated by false assumptions and a failure to read Aristotle in the context of his thought. The general assumption has been that Aristotle posited either an aesthetic or a moral purpose for drama. But I will try to show that this "either-or" way of putting the matter is not Aristotelian. Certainly the general tendency of ancient aesthetics lends weight to the moral school of interpretation, and there is much in the *Poetics* to support this.[30] As is well known, however, Aristotle does not say that the function of tragedy is the production of a moral *hexis* or disposition of any kind, but very plainly he says that the function (*ergon*) and purpose (*telos*) of drama is

[29] We should remember that children have no part in *proaeresis* (see above, note 9).

[30] For instance, the whole tendency of *Poetics*, ch. 2, is clearly in this direction; and throughout the *Poetics* (e.g., 1448B.24 ff., 1449A.2 ff., 1449B.10) there is much to show that morality and art were inepararably linked in Aristotle's thought.

the production of its specific pleasure (1453B.10f.; 1459A.21; 1462A.11–B1). This would seem to involve some contradiction. Furthermore, in the formal definition of tragedy (1449B.24–8) it is said, "Tragedy is an imitation of an action, worthwhile and complete, . . . accomplishing through pity and fear the catharsis of these (or suchlike) emotions." It cannot escape notice that Aristotle says nothing of pleasure here. We would have expected to find it in the definition, but catharsis seems to have been put in its stead. This further complicates the investigation. The problem of catharsis itself has also received no generally accepted solution. Most interpretations can be subsumed under three heads: (1) moral, (2) purgation and (3) purification.[31] All of

[31] It is not my concern here to enter upon an examination of all the various interpretations of the famous problem. A brief survey of the interpretations to his day is given by Butcher, ch. VI, along with a discussion of material from the *Politics* and Butcher's own extension of the medical theory. Also see Bywater (151–60) who has some pointed criticisms of the "purification" theory, but whose own adoption of the purgation or medical theory leads to a *reductio ad absurdum* (154): "With these latter (i.e., strongly emotional people) the tragic excitement is a necessity; but it is also in a certain sense good for all." Cf. Rostagni, xlv; Finsler (above, note 16) 116–22, who follows the medical interpretation, giving it an ethical twist; Gudeman (162–72), whose chief contribution to this problem is to see that the catharsis of the *Poetics* and the *Politics* have nothing in common except an analogical relationship. See, further, Franz Dirlmeier, "*Katharsis pathêmatôn*," *Hermes* 75 (1940) 81–92. In general—a full demonstration would require much more space—those who identify dramatic and musical catharsis make several essential mistakes. First of all, they fail to see that the conditions of drama (particularly its nature as action) are wholly dissimilar from those of music of any type. Secondly, in the passage *Pol.* 1342A.1 ff. where he speaks of the uses of "enthusiastic" and "cathartic" melodies, Aristotle expressly assigns performances of this sort for the delight of mechanics and laborers; this seems directly to contradict his requirement that drama should be serious. Thirdly, these interpreters fail to distinguish the meaning "moral"—in the sense that it may also be "immoral"—from "didactic" in Aristotle's use of *êthos* and *êthikos*. All melodies are ethical in a sense (cf. *Pol.* 1340A.7, 11, 23); the end or purpose of the melody determines the worth of its ethical effect.

Those who defend the medical theory at least base their arguments on the text. Those who advocate what has been called the "purification" theory posit a kind of serenity or psychical uplift which results from the purification of pity and fear. Their conclusions are perhaps less objectionable than the unmethodical and intuitive way in which the conclusions have been reached. For instance, Butcher (267) says: "The spectator who is brought face to face with grander sufferings than his own experiences a sympathetic ecstasy, or lifting out of himself. . . . In the glow of tragic excitement these feelings are so transformed that the net result is a noble emotional satisfaction." But such statements have little or no foundation in the text of Aristotle. A recent attempt has been made by House (above, note 1) 104 ff. to interpret catharsis from Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean. This is all quite Aristotelian, and I have no objection to it as such; but the question is what in drama specifically determines this result in the same sense as in real life "the practical wise man" (*ho phronimos*) through

these theories contain no doubt a portion of isolated truth, but they are concentrated too exclusively, it seems to me, on the notion of catharsis alone rather than on the whole ambience of related ideas about it. Now, in attempting a solution of these difficulties let us look, first of all, at the plain meaning of Aristotle's words on the function of drama (1453B.10–14): "We must not seek for just any pleasure from tragedy but only its proper pleasure. And since the poet must produce the pleasure deriving from pity and fear through imitation, it is obvious that this result must spring from the action."[32] Aristotle insists over and over upon this: pity and fear of the proper dramatic quality must come from the action (1453B.2); Reversals and Discoveries belong to the plot (1950A.34; 1455A.16); and when they are the result of the action, they produce pity and fear; and, further, a result of happiness or unhappiness is thus assured (1452A.36–1452B.2); the resolution (*lysis*) of a plot must result from the plot itself (1454A.37). Aristotle is thinking of an effect produced as a result of the motivation of the action in the sense we have already discussed; that is why he demands that the effect be regulated by the requirement of the "necessary or probable" (1452A.24; 1454A.33–6). It is not a simple, unqualified emotional effect that might result from viewing an emotional scene of some kind—a murder, let us say. That would be simply a *pathos*, mere sensationalism. It should now be clear, from our previous analysis of his concept of action and the type of hero he requires, just what Aristotle has in mind. Stated schematically, he is saying very simply that the proper effect of drama results from the proper type of action or plot. This is

his morally formed character establishes such a result for himself. Furthermore, it is illogical for House to define catharsis in this way and at the same time (93 ff.) to agree with Rostagni that *hamartia* is a *colpa involuntaria*. It is the very essence of Aristotle's ethics that we become moral by the performance of intentional moral acts. There is nothing intentional or necessary or probable (from the action) about an involuntary error.

[32] The Greek for this last clause is: *τοῦτο ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐμποιητέον*. For this Butcher has, "it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents." Cavils about the word "quality" to one side, there is nothing in the Greek corresponding with "incidents," and it is quite misleading. It has the effect of making the matter seem merely "incidental." The word "incidents" may be used to translate *epeisodia* but not the concept Aristotle has in mind here (cf. 1455B.17–23, where he discusses the plot of the *Odyssey*). He typically thinks of the unitary action or plot as the essential part of the story (*to idion*) and of the rest as "episodes." In the *Poetics* he regularly uses *ta pragmata* as an equivalent of the plot (1450A.22).

why he calls plot the first principle and, as it were, soul of drama (1450A.38); why it is the greatest of the parts of drama (1450A.15); this is why, identifying cause and effect, he calls it the *telos* of drama (1450A.22). To emphasize the importance of plot he tells us that one could have drama without character representation (êthê)—though strictly this is impossible, of course—but not drama without action (1450A.23–5). The reason for this is that it is the action which produces the function (*ergon*) of drama (1450A.31); that is, from the action there necessarily results an ending of happiness or unhappiness (1450A.17). Aristotle's insistence that the effects of drama follow from the action by necessary or probable motivation and the connection of this with his concept of action and its causes cannot be ignored for a right interpretation of the *Poetics*. The cause of action, as we have seen, is *proaeresis*; and in drama this would be the *proaeresis* of the hero. It is this that gives the action its close-knit unity of motivation. It is this unity which leads to the proper effect in both drama and narrative (1459A.17–21). What cause can there be for the unity and coherence of dramatic action other than this? It is this that qualifies the pity and fear and pleasure of drama so that it is the "proper" effect.[33] That is, the pleasure of drama (or pity in the case of the tragic end) is understood in terms of the action as well as felt. In terms of the action or plot we must understand at the end why the hero failed or succeeded.

Now, it may be wondered why the effect of drama is spoken of as a pleasure by Aristotle—and here we come to the matter of catharsis. Briefly—for having once seen that action is the specific qualifier of dramatic pleasure the rest is simple—the concept[34] is that pity and fear are painful emotions and that drama helps us to free ourselves of their harmful effects and so restore a healthy and pleasurable status. The medical theory of catharsis (above, note 31) was founded upon this concept. But if the pity and fear

[33] Cf. Reeves (above, note 27) 185: "Now catharsis is accompanied by pleasure and the catharsis of pity and fear by the tragic pleasure." This statement is true of course, but it does not mean anything until defined in terms of action, hero, etc. Cf. Bywater (154): " . . . its (pleasure's) precise nature is not explained, either in the existing book or elsewhere by Aristotle."

[34] Based on *Rhet.* 1382A.21, 1385B.13. I do not deny that for Aristotle there is a physical basis of these and other emotions. This may be important in a discussion of the psychology of pity and fear but has nothing to do with the specific meaning given to these terms in the *Poetics*.

of drama are not actual pity and fear[35] and do not require medical attention, then the catharsis or cleansing of pity and fear can only be understood as meaning a catharsis in terms of the action. These feelings of pity and fear which arise in the course of the drama become a pleasure because they reach some end or resolution in terms of, and because of, the morally motivated action. This resolution (every drama is both a *desis* and *lysis*, 1455B.24) is the effect or pleasure, as just defined, of the drama, and the process of its effectuation he calls catharsis—a metaphor no doubt from medicine.[36] One objection must be considered: Rostagni[37] has objected that catharsis cannot be identified with pleasure since catharsis is not a feeling whereas pleasure is. This is technically true enough, but it can certainly be the process of effectuating the pleasure (cf. the *perainousa* of the definition) and so in a loose way equivalent to it. Catharsis is at first glance perhaps an odd word for Aristotle to have used (and we must not forget that outside of the definition in chapter 6 he does not again use this word in this sense in the *Poetics*).[38] However, it expresses well his belief that emotions are painful until set right in some way.[39]

It will be seen that the formulation so far arrived at in respect to

[35] This has actually been assumed: see H. Sanborn, "A Sidelight on Katharsis," *CJ* 33 (1937–8) 322–35.

[36] The medical significance of the word is not in dispute; for details see Papanoutsos (above, note 16) 6. This meaning of the word is ultimately the reason for the medical interpretation itself.

[37] Rostagni, xliv, lvii; cf. Finsler (above, note 16) 116–9.

[38] This fact has led to the supposition that the promised explanation of catharsis is in the supposed lost second book of the *Poetics*; see Rostagni, xv, but against this view see Gudeman (168). Butcher (252) thinks there is a gap in our text. But at the beginning of ch. 19 Aristotle says: "The other parts of tragedy having been already discussed, it remains to speak of Diction and Thought." This implies certainly that all other aspects of his definition of tragedy have been treated in the foregoing chapters. It is certainly odd that Aristotle should leave the concept of catharsis out of consideration if it has the importance generally assigned to it. If, however, Aristotle meant by catharsis the pleasurable resolution of the action in accordance with the moral motivation of the action, then, wherever he speaks of the proper plot-type and hero he is in effect speaking of catharsis—that is, the requirements that will bring it about. That he did not use the term itself outside the definition of tragedy in ch. 6 is a significant indication that he was not in the *Poetics* thinking of pity and fear primarily in their psychological aspects but in their special dramatic sense.

[39] Cf. *Pol.* 1342A.14: *καὶ πᾶσι γίγνεσθαί τινα κάθαρσιν καὶ κουφίζεσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς.* It is clear from the *tina* of this passage that there may be many kinds of *catharses*. The phrase "to be pleasurably alleviated" expresses well the process that catharsis is, but if the specific qualifier of dramatic pleasure is the action or plot, then it can only be so understood and not in the medical sense.

the end of drama applies equally well to the happy ending (or "double plot" as Aristotle calls it at 1453A.31, meaning happy for the hero, unhappy for the villain) and to the unhappy ending. They both follow from the nature of plot as action. But there is another element to Aristotle's thinking about drama; it is not as systematic as his thinking about *praxis*, but is important nonetheless. I am referring to what may be called the purely aesthetic element in his theory of drama. Drama must contain the "astonishing element," he tells us.[40] It is not a complex matter; he explains it simply: *to de thaumaston hêdu* (1460A.17). Moreover, this is what he means to indicate often by the term "fear"[41] which he usually thinks of as having quite naturally a unitary effect with pity since the moment of the tragic end would give rise to them both. It is partly for the sake of the "astonishing element" in drama that Aristotle desiderates just those relationships in plot where this element would most effectively occur, i.e. in friendships or family relationships (1453B.19). It is interesting to note that he thinks of these situations as ending in murder or the like, in tragedy of a very overt form. This is why of course Aristotle prefers the tragic ending for drama—it is more astonishing—and why he gives the second place to the happy ending of the *Odyssey* (1453A.14, 30). There is no systematic reason in Aristotle's philosophy for this preference, but once he has so decided, then his concept of the ideal hero, *hamartia*, and dramatic pity must follow from this—given of course the nature of drama as morally motivated action and the further stipulation that the fall of a villain is not the best type of drama. This aesthetic element in his thinking is the very reason also—though it may seem strange at first sight—that he prefers the type of happy ending in the *Iphigenia* where a person is unknowingly about to slay a close relative but discovers the relationship just in time (1453B.29–1454A.8). Now, since Aristotle has previously in chapter 13 declared for the tragic ending in drama, it has been thought that he here contradicts himself. Cooper, in fact, calls this "the great discrepancy in the treatise."[42] But there is in

[40] *Poet.* 1460A.12; 1452A.4. Typically Aristotle has several terms to express this idea: *ekplêktikon* (1454A.4); *psychagôgei* (1450A.33); *to alogon* (1460A.13)—not to be confused with *alogon* in a different sense at 1454B.6.

[41] This is indicated by his use of the synonym *phrittein* (1453B.5) and *deina* (1453B.14).

[42] L. Cooper, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* (New York 1913) xxvi; cf. Glanville (above, note 2) 47.

my view no discrepancy here. This is not a contradiction of his general preference for the tragic ending—ordinarily that is more dramatic—but simply a special case of the same overall requirement of the "astonishing element." Furthermore, this type of happy ending in the *Iphigenia* is not morally repugnant,[43] and to be saved in the nick of time from a dangerous situation is even more astonishing and dramatic than the murder would be.[44] One more point concerning this aesthetic requirement: to be a part of true drama it too must be motivated by the action and be understood in terms of it. This is what Aristotle means by the seeming contradiction of *para tên doxan di' allêla* (1452A.4) and *tês ekplêxeôs gignomenês di' eikotôn* (1455A.17). Otherwise the effect is a mere *pathos*, sensationalism; we may feel it emotionally, but it does not mean anything in terms of the drama; it is not necessary or probable. If we do not understand it in terms of the drama's motivation, there can be no resolution, no catharsis.

As in the case of many of the other difficulties that supposedly plague the interpretation of the *Poetics*, it should now be evident that the much debated question whether the end of drama for Aristotle is aesthetic or moral is really no difficulty at all since, as so stated, the question would be meaningless for him.[45] Aristotle plainly thinks that the proper pleasure derived from drama is both. The end of drama is a pleasure, to be sure, but it is peculiarly qualified by very specific conditions: the type of hero with his special moral nature of lofty purpose but ineffective or misdirected accomplishment. Thus the pleasure that results is not a simple emotion, as in music, for instance, but in addition to its aesthetic element it is moral in the sense that it can, and must, be understood in terms of the morally motivated action. It is of

[43] So its opposite case (1453B.38) is the worst, i.e. to know the relationship, be on the point of murder, and yet not to do it. This case is morally repugnant (*miaron*) and also undramatic (*ou tragikon*).

[44] Cf. *Rhet.* 1371B.10: *αἱ περιπέτειαι καὶ τὸ παρὰ μικρὸν σώζεσθαι ἐκ τῶν κινδύνων* (sc. *ἡδύ*).

[45] It is surprising that Sir David Ross, *Aristotle* (London 1945) 290, should fail to see the true Aristotelian position in this matter; so Bosanquet (above, note 28) 18. Much modern failure to understand Aristotle correctly is due to the encumbrance of our own unconscious assumptions. We commonly assume that morality and life are different things or that the one, morality, is subjectively foisted upon the other. But, whatever the truth, this is not Aristotle's way of thought; to him life and morality are one, and therefore drama, which is a representation of human life (i.e. action), could in no way be purely aesthetic.

the utmost importance to realize in what sense the dramatic pleasure is moral. Butcher,[46] for example, could apparently understand "moral" only in the narrower sense of "didactic." Drama is not teaching; Aristotle points this up in the distinction between Empedocles and Homer (1447B.18). Empedocles, though he writes in verse, does not represent action in any way. The dramatist does not, as does the writer of fables, tack on a dreary moral at the end; but the drama's moral nature is an integral part of the drama itself: this is the nature of action for Aristotle and so of drama. It is this moral constitution of drama, particularly as embodied in the *proaeresis* of the hero, that gives the dramatic pleasure its importance and much of its force. This pleasure is not to be classed among the restorative pleasures[47] but belongs rather to the class of pleasures that "perfects," or is an inseparable concomitant to, an activity. As Aristotle saw, it is really impossible to separate the activity and its pleasure (*Eth. Nic.* 1175A.30 ff.). If the activity is good, the pleasure is good. This discovery that the pleasure of serious art (e.g. tragedy as distinguished from comedy) is at once aesthetic and moral is a truly unique and valuable contribution to aesthetics, one that needs emphasis today no less.[48] This is his real answer to Plato, one much more typically Aristotelian than the purely aesthetic view that nineteenth century critics, and more recent ones too, have been so fond of maintaining.

[46] Butcher, 220 ff. Also, in *Politics* VIII Aristotle is thinking of education for the young; his point of view there is almost wholly didactic.

[47] *Eth. Nic.* 1173B.7 ff.; Aristotle is here thinking of the somatic pleasures of eating, etc. Catharsis, a "cleansing," is not also a "filling up."

[48] This is the general point of view of Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason* (New York 1947); see particularly 503: "The poet, then, understands his subject in rational terms, and so employs language that he communicates simultaneously that understanding and the feeling which it properly motivates . . . an act of moral judgment," and 506: "The subject matter of poetry, on the other hand (i.e. as contrasted with mathematics), is human experience; it can therefore be understood only in moral terms."