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Beware of Imitations! - Aristotle and the Paradox of Fiction*

Abstract

Why doesn't Aristotle face a 'paradox of fiction'? Standard, plausible interpretations of his views on emotions generate an especially tricky 'paradox of fiction', because he holds that emotions should fit reality (not merely match the subject's beliefs). Paradox is avoided by his recognition of supposition-based human responses to mimetic works, where, for the purposes of appreciation, audiences accept things as being the way the work represents them. Operating within this supposition-generated perspective, tragic audiences' pity and fear can be vindicated as sensitive to fittingness. Adopting such a perspective can be justified by its benefits – pleasure, learning, and the development of transferable dispositions to respond emotionally in discriminating ways, inside and outside the theatre. Aristotle's position is of especial philosophical interest for avoiding a more troublesome paradox with simpler and more powerful resources than many more recent philosophical rivals.

Introduction.

In this paper, I both raise and attempt to answer puzzles about the consistency of Aristotle's very positive views about emotional responses to tragedy in the *Poetics* and his understanding of correctly functioning emotional response in the ethical works. These puzzles mirror the so-called "paradox of fictional emotions" or "paradox of fiction" in contemporary aesthetics,[1] which concern how it can be acceptable (i.e. not grounds for criticism of the subject)[2] for someone to respond passionately to objects they know to be mere fictions, and in situations that, they know, are not presenting them with anything in their circumstances that is really (say) pitiable or fearsome. Our first puzzle is that Aristotle seems to face a paradox of fiction. On prevalent, plausible interpretations, Aristotle's views in the ethical works on the correct and incorrect functioning of the passions, characteristic of virtuous and non-virtuous individuals respectively, commit him to

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1 E.g. (Schneider, 2009), (Gendler, 2011), for the terminology, and (Radford, 1975) , (Walton, 1978) for landmark treatments of the issue.

2 The type of acceptability in view in contemporary discussions usually concerns whether such emotions are rational. In Aristotle, the focus will be on whether such emotions are fitting. Both of these issues should be distinguished from the question of how it can be *possible* to respond emotionally to things known to be fictional. Cf. (Gaut, 2007) ch. 9 for the distinction. Treatments of Aristotle's views on "the paradox of fiction" in (Destrée, 2014) 14-16, and (Curran, 2015) 297-300, provide Aristotelian solutions to the latter issue with which I am (now) broadly in sympathy. Some such solution is presupposed here.

the following claim.

(P1)The pity and fear felt by audiences of tragedy are defective responses.

Yet his views in the *Poetics* seem to commit him equally to the following, incompatible claim.

(P2)Pity and fear are appropriate responses to good tragedy.

(P2) seems entailed by Aristotle's views in the *Poetics,* about normal, desirable emotional responses to good tragedy, and the place of tragedy among the natural practices of human communities. Since (P2) is both obviously Aristotelian and true, the puzzle is that Aristotle is seemingly committed to (P1).[3] This highlights a second puzzle, which is why Aristotle shows no hint of awareness of this issue. Can he simply have missed or ignored it?[4] If that verdict is unpalatable, we need to *explain why* Aristotle does not face a paradox of fiction, despite the good Aristotelian standing of the ingredients from which it arises: we are not entitled simply to *take for granted* that he does not face such a paradox. Most interpreters that have given the matter any attention have supposed it admits of some easy resolution, so the initial task is to show that existing responses are inadequate.

In section 1, I set out the argument from which a "paradox of fiction" threatens to arise, highlight some philosophically distinctive features of Aristotle's position and the paradox it threatens to raise, and consider what would be required to evade such a paradox. Sections 2 and 3 defend the key premises in the argument that yields (P1). Section 4 defends (P2), denying that Aristotle thought (as Radford did)[5] that emotional responses to fiction are defective. Sections 5 to 7 present the philosophical and textual case for the proposed solution to the paradox, before section 8 discusses and rejects a possible objection. Section 9 canvasses the merits and importance of Aristotle's position, thus understood.

1. Aristotle and the Paradox of Fiction

Aristotle is naturally interpreted as holding views that, in combination, generate a paradox of

3 This could be expressed as a puzzle over whether Aristotle was committed to: (P1*) a fully virtuous agent could not (without thereby compromising his virtue) experience pity and fear in the theatre at (what are known to be) invented objects. While this formulation of the issue, suggested to me by Hendrik Lorenz, is equivalent, I prefer to frame the issue in such a way as to make clear that it concerns our evaluation of the emotional responses to tragedy of *all* human agents.

4 The puzzlement of Socrates in Plato's *Ion* 535b-d at the rhapsode's emotional response to things he knows to be fictional highlights that puzzles in this area were known already in Aristotle's day. Cf., correctly, (Curran, 2015) 298 on the need to explain Aristotelian silence regarding a related puzzle.

5 (Radford, 1975) 78-9.

fiction. The basic argument below sets this out.[6]

1. Pity and fear are correct responses only if their objects are "unqualifiedly" pitiable / fearsome (which requires their being instantiated).[7]
2. Audiences of tragedy experience pity and fear.
3. The characters and events of the tragedy typically are the objects of its audience's pity and fear.
4. It is not the case that the characters and events of the tragedy are "unqualifiedly" pitiable / fearsome (because they are not instantiated).[8] [9]

THEREFORE (by *modus tollens*):

(P1)The pity and fear felt by audiences of tragedy are defective responses.

WHICH IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH:

(P2)Pity and fear are the appropriate response to good tragedy.

What is at issue in 1 and (P1) (denied in (P2)) is the claim that this pity and fear is *pro tanto* defective. It would not count as a resolution of the paradox to show that, despite their *pro tanto* defects, pity and fear at good tragedy are worth having because of their wider benefits.

We should notice some distinctive and philosophically significant features of this Aristotelian paradox.

One such feature is that the impropriety involved in (P1) consists in feeling pity and fear in the absence of appropriate *objects*.[10] By contrast, in the recent aesthetics literature, typically the

6 This outline is slightly different from that in (Radford, 1975) 68-71. But it makes clearer the focus on the *propriety* rather than the *possibility* of emotional responses to fiction, and the connections to Aristotle's views. It spells out, in Aristotelian terms, an argument similar to that in (Gendler and Kovakovich, 2005) 241.

7 "Unqualifiedly", here and in what follows, is simply a rendering of Aristotle's word ἁπλῶς, and indicates that the object's pitifulness or fearsomeness is independent of, and not merely relative to, the views or perceptions of some particular subject. Thanks to <SNIP>for help on this premise, discussed further in section 2 below.

8 It is to be understood here that something's featuring in a drama or other fictional work, i.e. being (as we say) "true in the fiction", does not make it true of that thing that it is instantiated, i.e. instantiated as something that has the features it is represented in the work as having. Cf. e.g. (Walton, 1990) 41-3.

9 That Aristotle accepts that events in tragedies were often not instantiated is taken for granted here. Cf. *Poetics* 9. 1451b15-32; 25. 1461b11-12; and this alongside Aristotle's likely awareness of occasional tragic productions that *did* explicitly represent recent historical events (cf. Aeschylus *Persae*, Phrynichus' *Capture of Miletus* (cf. Herod. 6.21.10)) suggests that he considered instantiation irrelevant to the propriety of tragedy's emotional effects.

10 'Object' here refers broadly to situations, facts, and features of the subject's situation, as well as to material

paradox is related to the subject's psychological coherence: the concern there is that emotions seem to be *rationally* defective where they are not aligned with the subject's *beliefs*.[11] An ancient paradox of this kind is harder to resolve than the modern one for this reason. The typical moves in resolving the modern paradox are to deny that beliefs are required to rationalise emotions, and to insist that emotions can be rationalised by being responses to what the subject perceives, thinks or imagines.[12] Yet an emotion may be rationalised in that kind of way without getting things right about whether there really is anything worth pitying and fearing instantiated. Aristotle's contention that it is a mark of cowardice to respond to things as though they were fearsome (i.e. to fear them) when in fact they are not so, is not adequately answered by pointing out the coherence of the coward's fear with his (mistaken) beliefs. One might press the point by observing that in most, if not all, cases of emotion, the subject's outlook will be such as to rationalise the emotion – that is to say that the subject will have some psychological 'story' according to which there is something worth (say) pitying or fearing in their circumstances. This, of course, does not render all emotions correctly felt. There is a further question about whether there really is something present that merits that response – that is to say, a question about the fittingness or truthfulness of the emotion, given the subject's circumstances.[13] The "Aristotelian" version of the paradox above presses a worry about how the contents of an invented narrative could render a real-world subject's emotions fitting, without thereby rendering implausibly low the standards for evaluating emotions as fitting or true. It is thus a distinct and tougher challenge than most recent versions of the paradox.

Another distinctive challenge arises from asking not how *we* might avoid this kind of paradox of fiction, but how *Aristotle* might have avoided it. Can a paradox of fiction be avoided without recourse to argumentative strategies foreign to Aristotle, but familiar to us from the recent literature on this topic in philosophical aesthetics? The most prominent such strategy is to claim that emotional responses to fiction are not made *in propria persona* by their subject, but are something like the reactions of a fictionalised self, reactions made as part of playing a role in an

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objects. The implicit contrast is between such things as these and the mere representation or imagination of them in a dramatic work or in an audience member's psychological economy.

11 Cf. e.g. (Gendler and Kovakovich, 2005) 241, and refs. there.

12 Cf. (Greenspan, 1981, 1988), (Gendler and Kovakovich, 2005) 246-8, (Gaut, 2007) 220-3, (Gendler, 2008) 637-9. The observation about emotional responsiveness to the subject's perspective is not a modern development – Aristotle himself seems to recognise that the passions are responsive to how things 'appear' (fallibly) to the subject (*Rhetoric* 2.1-11, the use of φαντασία and cognates at e.g. 1378a31, 1382a21, 1383b13), and to what possibilities are contemplated by the subject (e.g. *Rhetoric* 1.10-11, 2.2, 1378a30, b10) where such 'appearings' or contemplations need not consist in beliefs, cf. (Dow, 2015) ch. 10.

13 Cf. (D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000) 732-47, (Salmela, 2006) 389-401. The same point could be made *mutatis mutandis* in terms of the epistemic warrant for the emotion.

appreciative activity (or 'game') involving the characters and events of the fictional work.[14] Such views sometimes distinguish such emotional responses from their ordinary, real-world counterparts by calling them "quasi-emotions". On this view, the emotional responses may use the body and psychological mechanisms of the subject, but they are not strictly speaking hers, in something like the way in which the assertions and actions of an actor playing a part are not hers but the character's, even though they involve her body, voice, and doubtless many psychological processes too. Of course, the actor chooses to engage in acting that part, but that may be distinguished from the things that their character does, despite the systematic relationship between the two. I have nothing directly to say against the plausibility *for us* of solutions of this kind.[15] My observation here is simply that this cannot be *Aristotle's* view. I take for granted that he thinks that the audience's passions are their own (i.e. that he accepts premise 2 above),[16] and argue in section 3 below that, according to him, they are directed at the characters and events of the drama. Accordingly, this paper explores how the paradox can be avoided without detaching the subject from their emotions.[17] I take it that, quite apart from the historical concern to trace Aristotle's views accurately, this is of wide theoretical interest in aesthetics, insofar as it can illuminate the prospects for avoiding a paradox of fiction with a restricted array of philosophical resources: that is, without recourse to such things as quasi-emotions or fictionalised selves.

Explaining how Aristotle might not incur a paradox of fiction is distinctively challenging in one further way. That is that there is no trace of a worry about such a paradox in Aristotle's works. This might seem surprising, given Aristotle's close interest in the passions, across a whole variety of

14 (Walton, 1978) 13 "an actor impersonating himself", (Walton, 1990), (Walton, 1997), a position discussed in (e.g.) (Lamarque, 1991), (Neill, 1991) and (Säätelä, 1994). Cf. also (Meskin and Weinberg, 2003), (Friend, 2003) and (Gendler and Kovakovich, 2005).

15 Others have worried that such views distance the emoting subject unduly from the emotional responses under discussion (cf. e.g. (Lamarque, 1991), (Gaut, 1992), and in response, (Walton, 1997)) : the matter cannot be adjudicated here.

16 Cf. Aristotle's appeal to their emotional effects to distinguish comedy from tragedy and epic (*Poetics* 5. 1449a34 cf. 4. 1448b25, 5. 1449b10). Other key passages underlining the central place of emotion-arousal in tragedy include 6, 1450a22-28, a33, b16-20; 9, 1451b21-23, 1452a1-4; 11, 1452a38-b1; 13, 1452b28-33; 14, 1453b1-15; 26, 1462b12-15. I thus accept the standard view of the importance of emotion-arousal to Aristotle's understanding of tragedy, following e.g. (Destrée, 2014) 14-15; (Curran, 2015) 298-9; (Rapp, 2015), against those who have sought to excise ((Scott, 2003)), ((Veloso, 2008)) its centrality or reinterpret the references to audiences' pity and fear ((Belfiore, 1992) 179, chh. 6-7). Space does not permit retracing the arguments.

17 The position developed here may be best thought of as adding an additional tool to the explanatory armoury available to philosophical aesthetics, alongside strategies that invoke the responses of a fictionalised self. Which strategy should be used to explain the propriety of a given appreciator's responses will depend in part on the precise psychological details of how they are responding; and that is an empirical matter to establish.

areas,[18] and despite his interest both in the propriety of emotional responses under particular circumstances, and in how good tragedy should elicit emotional responses from the audience. Furthermore, the puzzle over the propriety of emotional responses to what is known to be fictional had been highlighted by Plato (*Ion* 535b-d). We seem to need an explanation of why the paradox does not arise for Aristotle that makes the threat of paradox sufficiently remote as not to demand consideration by him.[19]

2. Correct emotional response in Aristotle's ethical works.

In the ethical works, it is a mark of the virtuous that they experience passions only at those things that really merit them, and that this in turn exhibits their more general disposition to take pleasure and pain in the things that are genuinely pleasant and painful, i.e. in things that really are good and bad.[20] That this is so in relation to the passions is clear in his discussions of courage.

> *The cowardly, then, and the foolhardy are misled by their habits; for to the coward what is not frightening seems frightening, and what is slightly frightening greatly so, while in the opposite way, to the foolhardy man the frightening seems safe and the very frightening but slightly so; but the brave man thinks what they truly are. EE* 3.1, 1229b22-5.[21]

> *It is possible to be more or less afraid of these frightening things, and also possible to be afraid of what is not frightening as though it were frightening. The cause of error may be fear of the wrong thing, or in the wrong way, or at the wrong time, or something of that sort; and the same is true for things that inspire confidence.*
> *Hence whoever stands firm against the right things and fears the right things, for the right end, in the right way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident, is the brave person; for the brave person's actions and feelings reflect what something is worth (κατ' ἀξίαν) and what reason*

18 See (Fortenbaugh, 2002) for a survey.

19 One might worry that this holds Aristotle to a higher standard of emotional propriety than he himself recognises. In the *Politics*, at least, he seems to suppose that enjoying emotional responses to mimetic works is fine as long as it is harmless (*Politics* 7.17, 1336b21-3; 8.5, 1339b25-7; 8.7, 1342a15-16). However, it is unclear that for Aristotle regularly misdirected passions *would* be harmless; secondly, it is not obvious that Aristotle holds only to this lower standard consistently throughout the corpus (see section 2 above); and thirdly, if Aristotle considered emotional responses to tragedy *pro tanto* defective but on balance appropriate because they were (overall) harmless, this would give him a considerably less plausible and philosophically interesting view. I'm grateful to Malcolm Heath for drawing my attention to this point and to these passages.

20 The passions are, for Aristotle, closely connected with pleasure and pain: *EN* 2.5, 1105b21-23; *EE* 1220b12-14; *MM* 1.8.2. For a defence of the stronger claim that Aristotelian passions are pleasures and pains, see (Dow, 2011).

21 Translations of the *EE* are by J. Solomon in (Barnes, 1984).

[prescribes]. EN 3.7, 1115b13-20.[22]

There is more to having the virtue of courage than merely fearing things that are genuinely fearsome,[23] but what is required for our argument here is that fearing only those objects that merit that response (κατ' ἀξίαν, 1115b19) is a necessary condition of virtue. Responding with passions towards objects that do not genuinely merit them exhibits a defect of character, a failure to respond correctly.

This seems to be Aristotle's way of spelling out for particular character virtues like courage his general requirement that virtues and virtuous action need to be in accordance with correct reason, and open to correction by the agent's reason, functioning correctly.[24]

The same picture is reflected in relation to taking pleasure in what is genuinely pleasant.[25]

> *Do we love what is good for ourselves or what is good unqualifiedly (ἁπλῶς)? And is actual loving attended with pleasure, so that the loved object is pleasant, or not? For the two must be harmonised. For what is not unqualifiedly good, but perhaps bad, is something to avoid, and what is not good for one's self is nothing to one; but what is sought is that the unqualifiedly (ἁπλῶς) good should be good in the further sense of being good to the individual. For the unqualifiedly good is unqualifiedly desirable, but for each individual his own; and these must agree. Excellence brings about the agreement, and the political art exists to make them agree for those to whom as yet they do not. ... but the road is through pleasure; what is noble must be pleasant. But when these two disagree a man cannot yet be perfectly good, for incontinence may arise; for it is in the disagreement of the good with the pleasant in the passions that incontinence occurs. EE* 7.2, 1236b33-1237a9 (cf. also *EN* 10.5, 1176a10-19.)

The picture that emerges from these and other passages is that it is for Aristotle a necessary constituent of virtue to be disposed to take pleasure and pain in things that really are pleasant and painful (i.e., as he puts it, to make what is pleasant and painful *unqualifiedly* (ἁπλῶς) pleasant and painful *to me*), and to have passionate responses only at things that merit such responses. Notice

22 Translations of the *EN* are from (Irwin, 1985). On the points required for the argument here, there do not seem to be significant differences between Aristotle's position in the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.

23 Cf. e.g. (Lorenz, 2009).

24 Cf., on the requirement that virtues conform to correct reason, *EN* 3.5, 1114b26-30; 6.1, 1138b18-25; *EE* 2.5, 1222a6-12, b4-11; and for indications that this implies that virtuous actions should conform to correct reason, *EN* 1.13, 1102b25-33; 2.2, 1103b32-2; *EE* 3.4, 1231b32-3.

25 Cf. also *EN* 2.3, 1104b3-13; 3.4, 1113a25-b2; *EE* 7.2, 1236a3-7, 9-10. The translation above of ἁπλῶς has been adjusted to make it consistent with the rest of the paper.

that the contrast here is between things that really have the relevant feature and those that are erroneously represented in the minds of the non-virtuous as having it.

This latter point is worth emphasising. It is clear from these passages that for Aristotle, pitying and fearing as one should require more than that there be available to the subject some representational scheme (narrated, acted, portrayed, imagined, believed, or whatever) according to which the object pitied or feared is pitiful or fearsome (i.e. is pitiful or fearsome *within that narrative*). For the latter is true of *every* case of pity and fear: pity inherently involves the representation of its object as undeservedly undergoing harm (*Rhetoric* 2.8, 1385b13-6), fear of its object as involving future harm (*Rhetoric* 2.5, 1382a21-2). What Aristotle seems to insist is that correct emotional response involves being pleased or distressed (as one is in pity and fear) at what is *unqualifiedly* pleasant or distressing (pitiful or fearsome), i.e. what is really so, not merely what is represented as such in some narrative or representational scheme adopted by the subject. When Aristotle commits himself in the above passages to the view that some emotions are *incorrect*, his view is that part of the defect exhibited by the emotional responses of (say) the cowardly is that they misrepresent things as fearsome (and fear them accordingly) when they are not in fact fearsome. It seems to be a condition of correct emotional response that it represent things the way they really are. For Aristotle's position to avoid generating a "paradox of fiction", it seems that it must somehow identify a way in which the representations involved in emotional responses to tragedy correctly represent things as they are, whereas the representations involved in the fears of the cowardly do not.

Nevertheless, one might contend that what Aristotle is insisting on in the passages above is that (i) the object of one's fear (or pity, or other passion) *really have* the attribute of being fearsome (or pitiable, etc.), and not that (ii) the object of one's emotion *really be instantiated*. The idea here is that what virtue requires is that the subject's fear be directed at things that are such that, *if they were instantiated*, they would be fearsome, but that virtue does not require emotions to be sensitive to whether their objects are actually instantiated or not. If vindicated, this would nicely allow that – in the relevant sense – characters and events in a tragedy can be fearsome and pitiable, even though they are not instantiated.[26] However, I think this proposal cannot be sustained. Aristotle's discussion in the *Rhetoric* of the pleasure and distress involved in anger makes clear that these are precisely sensitive to whether their objects are instantiated or not. "What it is painful to lack, it is pleasant to get." (1.11, 1370b30-1) Aristotle is here generalising about how humans actually respond, but this must surely also be his view of *correct* human functioning in this area. Aristotle emphasises that anger involves an expectation of attaining revenge (1370b13-15; 1378b2-4), and

26 I am grateful to Malcolm Heath for his help in developing this possible response.

hence pleasure as one anticipates this prospect (1370b9-11; 2.1, 1378b1-10[27]). Indeed, he observes that when angry people come to realise that their anticipated vengeance won't be attained, they "get extremely distressed" (1370b31), whereas "they are rejoice if they think they will" (b32). Both joy and distress here involve the thought of gaining precious vengeance: this thought is pleasant when combined with the supposition that it will be realised, but is distressing when combined with the supposition that it won't. In the *De Insomniis*, Aristotle takes it to be a mark of the coward not just that they are more likely mistakenly to evaluate things as frightening that aren't, but also that they are more prone to supposing incorrectly that uncontroversially frightening things such as approaching enemy troops *are instantiated* (*De Insomn*. 2. 460b3-7). On the most straightforward reading of a passage in *De Anima* 3.3, Aristotle likewise insists that human passions are sensitive precisely to whether or not something terrible or fearsome is instantiated. When we take it that there really is something frightening there, we (correctly) respond with fear, whereas the recognition that the frightening thing, though it features in some representational mental state, is not actually instantiated but is merely imagined, leaves us (correctly) unmoved (*DA* 3.3, 427b21-24).[28] If this is indeed Aristotle's view,[29] he is surely correct to hold it. When we consider the possibility that art thieves got away with the most precious works in the gallery's collection,

27 *Rhetoric* 2.1, 1378b8-10 offers a second distinct explanation for the pleasures of anger, which is that in the contemplation of revenge, one simply enjoys "dwelling on it in thought", just as the appearances cause pleasure "in dreams". This could itself be presented as evidence that Aristotle supposed that pleasure could be rationalised simply by appearances as of things that, if instantiated, would be pleasant, and in ways that were insensitive to whether or not they actually were instantiated. But this is certainly not required – his wording suggests the adoption of something akin to a state of dreaming, in which critical faculties are often suspended and appearances simply accepted (*De Insomn.,* 3. 461b3-462a15), as they are "dwelt upon in thought". Of course, this *is*, in a way, precisely to be insensitive to whether or not they are instantiated. But this is not a recognition of the irrelevance of the latter to the propriety of affective response. Rather, it is achieved by mimicking a state in which the appearances are presumed true. As will become clear below, this is, I believe, closely akin to how Aristotle understands the audiences' emotional engagement with tragedy.

28 Cf. (Moss, 2012) 90-1; (Dow, 2015) 217-8 and references there; and (Curran, 2015) 299-300.

29 The counter-proposal I am rejecting here might appeal to a number of further types of cases, none of which seem to me to give it substantial support. The pleasures of lovers and of those grieving (*Rhet* 1.11, 1370b19-29) are an enjoyment of a quasi-visual experience putting them in a kind of contact with the object of their affection. Perhaps the virtuous take pleasure in the *prospect* of virtuous action (and are pained when they consider the possibility of acting badly) in ways that do not assume that these prospects are what will happen, but it is hard to find a passage in Aristotle that clearly and explicitly expresses this view. The cases of dogs and lions in *EN* 3.10, 1118a18-23 seem to be anticipatory pleasures in what will happen, though the details are disputed (Cf. e.g. (Lorenz, 2006) 124-32, (Moss, 2012) 55-6). It looks plausible to say that taking pleasure in the animal's goal plays a crucial role in locomotion (*De Motu* 8.701b33-702a2, and cf. (Lorenz, 2006) 131-2; (Moss, 2012) 22-9.), but however this is construed, it needs to be understood in such a way as to recognise that this pleasure is not such as to satisfy the animal, since it impels it to make that goal a reality. Thus, animal pleasures of this kind *must* be sensitive to whether or not their object is instantiated.

whether we feel aghast or relieved should – quite obviously – be sensitive to whether that possibility is instantiated. The content that is represented is, on its own, insufficient to render one or another emotional response correct.

Aristotle's position, then, is that pity and fear are correct, virtuous responses only if their objects really are pitiable and fearsome things that are instantiated. To feel pity or fear in the absence of such objects is to respond inappropriately or defectively. That this view emerges from a very natural reading of some central Aristotelian texts explains why it is so widely held to be one of the Aristotelian conditions on correct emotional response.[30]

3. Audience emotions are directed at things in the tragedy.

Regarding the objects of the audience's emotions, one might suppose that a paradox of fiction does not arise for Aristotle because, although he envisages the audience responding to tragedy with real pity and fear, he envisages these as directed not at the events and characters in the play but at something else instead[31] (i.e. he denies premise 3 in the argument above).

I consider two forms this view might take. Aristotle might think:

1. That the events of the drama serve to trigger in audiences pity and fear for themselves and others in the real world. This might be on the basis that the characters and events in the drama exemplify[32] universals that the audience recognises as actually instantiated by themselves and others.
2. That audiences pity and fear the characters and events in the tragedy only as proxies for real-world persons and things that constitute the "real" (or most important) objects of their emotions, i.e. for the real-world instantiations of the universals exemplified in the drama by the characters and events.

Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, connects poetry in general with universal features of human nature (e.g. *Poetics* 4), and in contrasting poetry with history (in *Poetics* 9), famously contends that poetry "speaks more of the universal" than history, and is for that reason "more philosophical and serious than history" (1451b5-7). These proposals may naturally be thought of as developing the general position clearly indicated in these texts by Aristotle, and showing how he might have understood

30 Cf. e.g. (Kosman, 1980), (Burnyeat, 1980), (Gosling and Taylor, 1982) esp. ch.13, (Broadie, 1991) 74-82, (Cooper, 1999) 245-7, (Lorenz, 2009), (Moss, 2012) 153-199.

31 Thus, the suggestion of (Belfiore, 1992) that when we see and pity the suffering of the characters, this triggers *additional* fears for ourselves, does little to mitigate the paradox (p. 230, 236).

32 i.e. are represented as instantiating.

its application to audience emotions.[33]

I will argue that neither view can be sustained. In rejecting them, I will review evidence from Aristotle directly in support of the view that the objects of audience pity and fear are the characters and events in the drama. I will then adduce a range of arguments specifically against attributing to Aristotle the second "proxy" view of audience emotions. But first, I will highlight a number of ways in which universals and facts about the subject's own situation *are* involved in emotions, since these might (incorrectly, I suggest) be taken to lend support to these proposals.

That the sufferings for which I pity someone are "such as might befall me"[34] does not make me the real object of that pity. The involvement of a certain perception of my own vulnerability (or liability to harms) is simply a condition of pitying *anything*. This does not in any way imply that it is I myself, *rather than the object in question,* that is the true object of pity. No. This is at most (for Aristotle) simply a general feature of pitying anything or anyone, that we be able to envisage ourselves suffering the same fate as those we now pity. Likewise, the fact that my fear for X may cause me to fear for myself, does not make my own situation (rather than that of X) the real object of my fear.

As regards the involvement of universals, it is always necessary for objects of pity and fear to instatiate the universals involved in being pitiable and fearsome. It would be simply a mistake to infer from this that it is the universals (rather than the things that instantiate them) that are the real objects of my pity and fear.

Thus, it is clear that there are a number of ways in which our own situation on the one hand, and universals on the other, are involved in pity and fear quite generally, but in ways that lend no support whatsoever to the suggestion that it is universals (or one's own situation) that are the real objects of the audience's emotions, rather than the characters and events of the drama.

In rejecting the specific proposals under consideration, it is important to note the direct textual evidence showing that it is the characters and events of the drama that are the objects of audiences' pity and fear. Since others have made the case very plausibly from within the *Poetics*,[35] I will simply call attention to one important additional piece of evidence from outside the *Poetics.* Aristotle's remarks about pity in *Rhetoric* 2.8 seem to *require* us to suppose that he thought that the objects of

33 I am grateful to Catherine Rowett, Victor Caston, and an anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft, for help in developing and evaluating these alternative views.

34 Cf. *Rhetoric* 2.8, 1385b14-15.

35 Cf. e.g. (Heath, 1991) §3; (Curran, 2015) 162-6, 186-9. Key passages are *Poetics* 9.1452a2-4, and 13.1452b34-1453a7.

dramatic audiences' pity were the characters and events of the drama.

> *Since it is sufferings that appear close at hand that arouse pity, and things that are centuries away in the past or the future, being held neither in people's expectations or their memories, they pity either not at all or not in the same way, those who work on their audience incorporating gestures, tone of voice, clothing and acting generally are bound to be more pitiful. For they make the harm appear close at hand, putting these things before the eyes either as just about to happen, or as just gone. And what has just happened and or is shortly about to happen is more pitiful.* (*Rhetoric* 2.8, 1386a29-b1)

Aristotle is here making recommendations to public speakers. But he does so by adverting to a similarity between their situation and that involved in dramatic performances, and the need for orators to learn in this regard from actors. Tragedies are precisely a situation (unlike the context of most Greek oratory) in which the characters and action are assumed to be "centuries away"[36] in the heroic age, typically, and need to be brought close at hand by the art of the actor (and perhaps by other devices too). Aristotle is thinking of this as a problem that needs to be overcome, and for which the devices of "acting generally", including gesture, tone of voice, and costume, comprise a significant part of the solution. But if, in tragedy, audience emotions were directed towards (timeless) universals or their present-day instantiations, there would be no problem to be overcome. The problem only makes sense if one allows Aristotle the (common-sense) view that audience pity is directed at the characters and events of the tragedy. These considerations are sufficient basis to reject the first proposal under consideration, i.e. that Aristotle saw audiences' emotions as straightforwardly directed towards themselves or other real-world objects rather than towards the characters and events of the drama.

I turn now to the suggestion that, for Aristotle, audiences pitied and feared (for) the characters and events in the drama, but only as proxies for real-world persons and things that constitute the "real" (or most important) objects of their emotions. This suggestion is a more interesting proposition. It doesn't require denying that the characters and events of the drama are objects of the audience's emotions in some significant sense. It is rather the claim that they serve as such only as proxies for the "real" objects of audience pity and fear, the real objects of their concern, which are either some range of relevant universals, or – more plausibly – the real-world objects that instantiate those universals.

We can readily acknowledge that where one thing stands as a proxy for another, this makes an important difference to how it should be treated. Let us consider two such cases. People in various countries regularly use the US flag as a proxy for the country itself, as an object of either veneration

36 Μυριοστὸν: literally, ten thousand years away!

(through saluting, or pledging allegiance) or hostility (through burning or trampling). Sports referees regularly deal with team captains as proxies for their team, reprimanding and instructing them as a way of doing so to the team as a whole. In these contexts, it would be a mistake to point out that the flag *itself* didn't merit salutes or burning, or that the captain hadn't *personally* infringed the rules. The agents' actions towards the proxy need to be evaluated in relation to the thing for which it is a proxy: does the *US* merit allegiance, or hostility, and had the captain's *team* infringed the rules? If Aristotle thinks that the audience responds to the characters and events of a tragedy as proxies for real-world people and events that instantiate relevant universals, then we should evaluate their responses accordingly. So, the suggestion is that when audiences pity Cassandra, they are really pitying (say) those caught up as innocent parties in larger events wherein they are powerless to avoid harm and ruin wrought by more powerful others. And when audiences fear for Oedipus, they are really fearing (say) terrible things that might befall themselves or others to which they have unwittingly contributed. If this view was Aristotle's, then we could reject step 3 in the problematic argument above, and thereby the paradox.

How can we tell whether this "proxy claim" is correct? The claim already concedes that for Aristotle the events and characters of the drama *are* objects of the audience's pity and fear. So, the evidence to that effect is not decisive. It makes sense to ask, quite generally, how we can tell whether some behaviour (action or emotion) by A directed at some object X is directed at X *in its own right*, or at X *as a proxy for* Y. The referee and flag cases are helpful guides in this regard. The likely indicators that A is treating X as a proxy for Y are:

1. That A is regarded by themselves and/or others as responding primarily to Y rather than X.
2. That A's response to X has greater merit (makes more sense, or is more justifiable) if it is regarded as a response to Y, rather than to X in its own right.

These provide the basis for concluding that Aristotle does not think that audiences respond emotionally to characters and events in the drama as proxies for real-world "counterparts" (i.e. real-world instantiations of the universals that those characters and events exemplify in the drama). The case is as follows.

Firstly, audiences are not described by Aristotle as regarding the objects of their emotions in this proxy-like way. Direct evidence of this view seems to be missing.

Secondly, regarding audience emotions in this way does not make those emotions better justified or make better rational sense. Of course, audience emotions that treated the characters and events of the drama as proxies for their real-world counterparts would, in cases where such counterparts existed, avoid a situation where those emotions had uninstantiated objects. If we confine our

attention to such cases, this might seem like an attraction of a "proxy view" of how Aristotle envisaged audience pity and fear – it has the merit of giving the audience emotions with an instantiated target. But it will in fact, as often as not, fail to deliver even that. Consider Aristotle's own example of the universals involved in the plot of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris:*

> *A certain maiden having been offered in sacrifice, and spirited away from her sacrificers into another land, where the custom was to sacrifice all strangers to the Goddess, she was made there the priestess of this rite. Long after that the brother of the priestess happened to come; the fact, however, of the oracle having bidden him go there, and his object in going, are outside the plot of the play. On his coming he was arrested, and about to be sacrificed, when he revealed who he was—either as Euripides puts it, or (as suggested by Polyidus) by the not improbable exclamation, 'So I too am doomed to be sacrificed, as my sister was'; and the disclosure led to his salvation.* (*Poetics* 1455b2-12)[37]

Whether audiences' pity of and fear for Iphigenia and Orestes have an instantiated target will depend on whether the real world contains (or contained) an actual instantiation of a girl spirited away from a sacrifice, who becomes a priestess in a cult of the type described! The plot of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* is perhaps fairly outlandish among ancient tragedies, but the problem will still be widespread. Most of the tragedies we have extant involve involve characters and events that exemplify in the world of the drama universals that simply do not have instatiations in the real world.[38]

This highlights a further problem. On this view, the propriety of audiences' emotional responses to tragedy depends on the wrong things. Rather than this depending (as we tend to suppose) on whether they are appropriately matched to the contents of the drama, it will depend on whether the real world contains a sacrifice-victim-turned-priestess or a father-slaying-mother-marrying king. This is a decisive *reductio ad absurdum* of the proposal.

The initial plausibility of the "proxy view" rested in large measure on Aristotle's observation that poetry "speaks more of universals" than history (1451b6-7). Although it is rather contested exactly how we should understand Aristotle's remarks in the passage from which that phrase is drawn, enough is agreed to rule out the proxy view.

> *It is also clear from what has been said that the function of the poet is not to say what has happened, but to say the kind of things that would happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability and necessity. ... The distinction [between the historian and the poet] is this: the one says what has*

37 Translations of the poetics are from (Heath, 1996).

38 One might try to insist that there are always universals at a higher level of generality (e.g. people suffering undeservedly in ways that are partly due to their own mistakes). But, although this may be a possible view, it is not Aristotle's, as his explanation and illustration of the role of universals in tragedy shows.

> *happened, the other the kind of thing that would happen. For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars. The universal is the kind of speech or action which is consonant with a person of a given kind in accordance with probability or necessity; this is what poetry aims at, even though it applies individual names. The particular is the actions or experiences of (e.g.) Alcibiades.* (*Poetics* 9. 1451a36-b11)

The kind of way in which universals are involved in poetic composition and performance, according to this proxy view, could be best exemplified by standard interpretations of Euripides' *Trojan Women*. According to these, while the play purports to be centrally about Hecabe and the other captured women from Troy, its real subject is the victims of Athenian aggression in Euripides' own day.[39] If this were how we should understand Aristotle's view of responses of pity and fear to tragedy quite generally, then the paradox would be disarmed, on the basis that (let us allow) the real objects of audience pity and fear are real-world victims of violent aggression, for which Hecabe and the other characters are proxies.

Although this view could perhaps be defended as *a* possible view of certain tragedies like the *Trojan Women*, it cannot be *Aristotle's* view of the objects of audience pity and fear in the tragic theatre. Two objections will suffice. Firstly, it does not generalise – it is much harder to apply this approach to *Iphigenia in Tauris*, or *Oedipus Tyrannus,* or indeed to most other tragedies that Aristotle is likely to have considered. Secondly, this view seems to mistake the way in which Aristotle saw universals as involved in the production of and response to poetry. The universals involved in poetry, Aristotle says, concern the kind of speech or action that a particular kind of person would be disposed to, either typically or as a matter of necessity. Thus, someone like Orestes would in his circumstances feel compelled to kill his mother to avenge his father. On the view we are considering, Aristotle would be claiming that such a focus on universals makes poetry "more philosophical and more serious" than history because it enables the achievement of a deeper understanding of things in the real world, presumably real-world instantiations of the universal that Orestes is represented as instantiating in the drama. Engaging with a tragedy about Orestes, on this view, enables us better to grasp relevant universals, and thereby gain a deeper understanding of the dispositions of (say) those real-world individuals unable to escape from cycles of ancestral violence. And, in line with this kind of view, audience emotions of pity and fear are really directed towards the latter, real-world, objects.

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39 Often this is tied specifically to the sack of Melos and ensuing massacre of males and enslavement of women and children, though this connection is not without its problems. Cf. (Kip, 1987), (Kuch, 1998). Since the things done to the Melians had also been perpetrated elsewhere, this interpretative line can easily be reformulated to avoid the chronological worries specific to the sack of Melos.

But such a view seems at odds with what Aristotle himself seems most to have in mind in *Poetics* 9 and elsewhere in highlighting the role of universals in poetry. His focus is on universals that relate to what happens "necessarily or for the most part" (1451b8-9), and hence to the sequence of actions and events in the tragic plot. Aristotle's remarks about poetry and universals are clearly connected in this passage with the sections that precede and follow it.[40] What precedes is Aristotle's setting out three requirements of good tragedy. It must be an imitation of a "complete" (*teleios*) action, with a beginning, middle and end such that the latter are such as to follow the former "*either necessarily or in general*" (1450b29). It should have the kind of "magnitude in which a series of events occurring sequentially *in accordance with probability or necessity* gives rise to a change from good fortune to bad fortune, or from bad fortune to good fortune" (1451a11-15). And it should have a unity of subject matter that is plot-centred, such that "the transposition or removal of any one section dislocates and changes the whole" (1451a33-4), a remark which, coming immediately before the start of *Poetics* 9, is most naturally taken also as involving the requirement that the characters and events of the drama stand in relations of probability and necessity to one another. That this is the focus of Aristotle's concern with universals is reinforced by the implications he draws immediately following the passage from *Poetics* 9 quoted above. He connects his remarks about universals with the goal of tragedy to evoke pity and fear, commenting that "these effects occur above all when things come about contrary to expectation but *because of* one another" (1452a4), where this is contrasted with things happening spontaneously, by chance or at random. In other words, things are more pitiful and fearsome when they come as the necessary or probable result of what has happened or been done (especially by the agent in question, inadvertently perhaps) earlier in the plot.[41]

If this is correct, then Aristotle's concern with universals has nothing to do with making real-world entities the objects of audience attention and response.[42] Instead it has to do with the relationship between characters and events within the world of the drama, i.e. a concern that they stand in causal or explanatory relations to one another, and exemplify *in the drama* universals regarding what happens necessarily or for the most part, given circumstances and agents of such-and-such kinds.

As a result, not only is the "proxy view" implausible and difficult to apply to the relevant range of dramatic works, but it also looks undermotivated, because Aristotle's association of poetry with "speaking more of the universal" turns out after all *not* to support the idea that tragedy invites

40 Cf. "is it clear from what has been said" 1451a36, and "So it is clear from these points …" 1451b27.

41 This is expounded convincingly in (Heath, 1991).

42 Indeed, arguably the "proxy view" implies a position that is directly at odds with how Aristotle contrasts poetry and history: i.e. such that poetry is concerned with the possible rather than being focused firmly on the actual.

audience responses directed primarily at objects in the real world of the audience. If the "proxy view" also fails, we are forced to return to crediting Aristotle with the common-sense claim that is the third premise of the argument that generates the paradox, viz. that the characters and events of the tragedy typically are the objects of its audience's pity and fear.

Aristotle takes such characters and events to be uninstantiated representations ("imitations") of things that are pitiable and fearsome. This seems to fall short of their being something that would warrant pity and fear in the real-world audience member. This is of course not to impugn those tragedies, it is merely to state the obvious about them. Nevertheless, this is something that is either missed or denied or glossed over far too briefly by many interpreters. The fact that Oedipus or Iphigenia is pitiable *in the world of the drama*[43] does not entail, still less is it the very same fact as, that he or she is pitiable *to the (real, human) audience.*[44] It remains false in the real world of the audience that the tragic characters and events are instantiated pitiable or fearsome things. These characters and events are represented but not instantiated.

And if so, then the argument seems to go through, supporting the conclusion (P1) that, on the basis of what we have argued to be thoroughly Aristotelian premises, audiences' emotional responses to (those fictional elements in) tragedies are incorrect or defective.

4. Aristotle did not accept that emotional responses to tragedy were defective.

This conclusion is unpalatable. Radford thought it should be accepted, but few have followed him.[45] Could Aristotle have accepted it?

Emphatically: no. Aristotle sees the arousal of emotions as central to successful tragedy,[46] and *Poetics* 4 (discussed below) makes clear that tragedy is an expression of the successful functioning of human capacities for creating and appreciating "imitations".[47] There can be no doubt: Aristotle is

43 The same applies to whatever relevant "worlds" there may be, including Walton's game-worlds and work-worlds, whose contents include the contents represented in works of fiction; cf. (Walton, 1990) 58-61. The crucial distinction here is between all such worlds and the real world in which the audience exist and live.

44 This is denied or glossed over by at least (Belfiore, 1992), (Halliwell, 1986), (Halliwell, 2002), (Nehamas, 1992); the point is seen by (Woodruff, 1992), though even he still does not see the problem about the *propriety* (as opposed to the possibility) of emotional responses to tragedy that this fact helps to generate. The fact that representations of emotion-proper properties do not thereby merit the corresponding emotions from 'observers' of those representations is underlined by Aristotle's observations about audience responses to paintings, in *DA* 3.3, 427b23-24.

45 (Radford, 1975).

46 Cf. fn. 16 above.

47 Here and elsewhere in this paper, "imitations" simply stands for Aristotle's term μιμήσεις (and similar terms) that I take to mean, roughly, representations that work by means of similarities to what they

unhesitatingly positive about the emotional responses of audiences. When these are elicited in response to appropriate objects in the drama, this is the successful exercise of the audiences' emotional capacities, called forth by the successful exercise of the poet's (and others') art. There is in the whole of his *oeuvre* no hint that he saw such responses as defective.

Two further reasons support this conclusion. One is that while Aristotle is clearly capable, in the *Poetics* as elsewhere, of identifying typical responses of actual audiences as defective in some way,[48] he does not do so regarding audiences' passionate responses of pity and fear. Indeed, his suggestion that "a person" merely hearing the plot of the *Oedipus* would shake with fear and feel pity at the events (14, 1453b4-7, noting: ἅπερ ἂν πάθοι τις, b6), suggests, if anything, a degree of *idealisation* of audiences and their responses.[49]

Another reason is that we see Aristotle in the *Poetics* offering accounts of the objects of pity and fear very similar to those in the *Rhetoric*.[50] Since the latter accounts clearly give his view of what the objects and grounds of pity and fear (and the other passions) are when they are functioning more-or-less as they should, it makes sense similarly to take Aristotle to be operating similarly in the *Poetics* with a presumption of broadly correctly-functioning audience emotions. If so, he can hardly have accepted (P1)'s charge of systematic emotional error on the part of audiences.

We are faced with an inconsistency between the approval with which Aristotle endorses the passionate responses of theatre audiences to tragedy (P2), and the conclusion (P1) of an argument that is clearly valid and seemingly rests on premises with impeccable Aristotelian credentials. And it would be no less palatable than accepting its conclusion to suppose that Aristotle had simply not seen the inconsistency.[51]

5. Aristotle and the Paradox of Fiction

What is needed is a way to disarm the paradox that is at once intelligible, coherent and authentically Aristotelian. I take the prospects for rejecting premises 2, 3 and 4 to be dim, and focus attention on premise 1.

represent. It clearly does not imply the view that such things are copies of real-world objects.

48 Cf. for example, 13, 1353a30-35; 26, 1461b27-1462a4; and (Halliwell, 1986) 169.

49 (Halliwell, 1986) 168-70.

50 Cf. esp. 13. 1452b-1453a7, alongside *Rhetoric* 2.5, 1382a21-22; 2.8, 1385b11-16. This point is made, and the possible points of discrepancy explored between the accounts offered in the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* , in (Belfiore, 1992), (Nehamas, 1992).

51 (Curran, 2015) also evidently also regards this as unpalatable (298).

1 Pity and fear are correct responses only if their objects are "unqualifiedly" pitiable / fearsome (which requires their being instantiated).

The difficulty Aristotle's view seems to present concerns different ways in which an object might be fearsome (and *mutatis mutandis* pitiful).

Since being unqualifiedly fearsome has been seen (in section 2 above) to require that the object be instantiated, clearly characters and events in the drama (where these are the poet's invention) will be unable meet this in any straightforward way, even if they are fearsome-in-the-drama. The audience feels that Cassandra is going to a cruel death through no fault of her own. But neither Cassandra nor these circumstances are instantiated (now or ever).

Aristotle's view, I suggest, is that the objects of audience emotions meet this standard *in a way*, a way significant enough to avoid the paradox and to comply with the spirit of premise 1. The view is that for Aristotle, engagement with mimetic works standardly involves supposing, and supposing creates the context within which the capacities involved in appreciation and response are exercised, and with respect to which their exercise should be evaluated. Exercised within this context, the audience's fear is a response to objects that *are* instantiated, using emotional capacities that are sensitive to *whether or not* their objects are instantiated.

Mimesis, Supposing and the Context of Engagement

Some further explanation is needed of the role of supposing in how, for Aristotle, humans engage with mimetic works. As others have recognised, Aristotle's thinking about mimesis concerns audience response and appreciation as much as it does the creation of mimetic works.[52] Some standard modes of response and appreciation, including those to which Aristotle calls attention, such as children's play and learning, involve supposing that things are the way they are represented in the mimesis. Supposing is not a standalone activity, it is done with a view to creating a context within which other activities such as perceiving, recognition, learning and emotional response can take place.

The view of audiences' appreciative responses to mimetic works are then understood as follows.

Firstly, audiences suppose, or accept, for the purposes of appreciation, that things are the way the work presents them as being. This creates a context for doing the various things involved in appreciation of the work. It does not involve the subject's changing their beliefs, since it is supposing for specific purposes (i.e. for appreciating the work). It is akin to pretending that

52 Cf. e.g. (Halliwell, 2002) 159-163.

something is the case, but some of the possible implications of "pretending" are distracting:[53] accepting that things are thus and so for the purposes of appreciation need not be done voluntarily, and one may be drawn into a work's perspective gradually while scarcely realising this is happening (both of these are not normally associated with "pretending that"). This acceptance is an ongoing activity, as the work unfolds its characters, events, circumstances and so on.

Secondly, then, the audience undertake whatever activities are constitutive of appreciation, including (for tragedy) feeling pity and fear, *within the scope of the context created by the supposing*, i.e. within the scope of their acceptance of things' being the way the work presents them. Such emotions, although exercised within the scope of what is being supposed (which may well include things the subject knows to be fictional), are themselves exercised *in propria persona* and are the subject's genuine responses.[54] [55] Because these emotional capacities are exercised within the scope of the supposition, norms for correct emotional response such as those in premise 1 above will

53 Although the concept of "pretending that" does not quite capture what audiences do, it is nevertheless instructive, because of the many similarities. Pretending that involves accepting that things are a certain way (or perhaps accepting the basis for generating what will be taken to be the case, e.g. on the basis of how the work presents things), and it is undertaken always with a view to undertaking some further range of activity. Sometimes the further activity is itself pretending, as in children's pretence play, but it need not be. Cf. (Austin, 1958), (White, 1988), (Nichols and Stich, 2000), (Rakoczy et al., 2004), (Gendler, 2011), (Lillard, 2014).

54 The close parallel with pretending-that is helpful here. A person may pretend that p for the purposes of doing some further thing (Φing). But it does not follow from this that the person is pretending to Φ. When, for the purposes playing the game *Cluedo*, I pretend that a murder has been committed, I am not thereafter merely *pretending to work out* who did it. I am actually working out who did it. It is a genuine and sincere exercise *in propria persona* of a capacity directed at the hypothesised state of affairs, exercised within the scope of what has been pretended.

55 Thus, Aristotle's view as proposed here has much in common with, but is also importantly different from, Walton's idea that appreciative engagement with works of art involves a kind of 'make believe' in which one plays the role of a participant in an appreciative game, located in the world of the game, cf. esp. (Walton, 1990). The controversial idea that the appreciating subject fictionalises their own role in the game, is clearly absent from the Aristotelian view. Notice also that audiences do not undertake a temporary adoption of *beliefs* (e.g. that things are the way they are represented in the work), suspension of disbelief, or wholesale taking of the work as 'transparent'. The perspective adopted by audiences, on the proposed view, is insulated from the subject's wider psychology – such that, for example, a person can enjoy and learn from detailed pictures of corpses or the lowest creatures, in ways that require that engagement with these doesn't spread across to finding them distressing in the kind of ways one would if one was taking them really to be present. See below, section 6. The view developed here ultimately attributes to Aristotle a position quite similar to that developed in (Meskin and Weinberg, 2003), but it is narrower in scope insofar as 'accepting with a view to appreciation of a mimetic work' is a very specific way of contemplating a possible way things might be. In that regard, the view developed here contributes to answering the puzzle noted at the end of their paper (p. 32), about why thinking of *possibilia* only sometimes tends to (or should) trigger emotional responses.

apply on the basis of how things are within the (supposed) world of the work. Thus, audiences are expected to fear / pity all and only things within the work that are fearsome / pitiful, including the requirement that these be instantiated (within the supposed world of the work). There are such things as lies within fictions, and fictions-within-fictions, and audiences should discern these for what they are, and their emotional responses should be adjusted accordingly. Hence, while it is right to pity Hamlet's father and be angry at Claudius, it is a mistake to pity Gonzago and be angry at his murderer, since both of the latter are fictional, uninstantiated. Within the scope of what we accept for the purposes of appreciating *Hamlet*, i.e. within the world of the work, we should respond with pity and other emotions only to those objects that merit them "unqualifiedly", as Aristotle says, where this includes the requirement that they be instantiated.

Thus, where emotional capacities are engaged as part of a structured set of appreciative activities undertaken within a context created by supposing, the resulting emotions can respect norms for emotional response, including the requirement that their objects be instantiated.

If the above picture is Aristotle's, then we might modify premise 1 of the original argument to read as follows:

1*. Pity and fear are correct responses only if it is true that their objects are, given the subject's context, "unqualifiedly" pitiable / fearsome (which requires their being instantiated).

The correspondingly adjusted version of premise 4 could then be rejected as false (since the objects of fear / pity *would* be unqualifiedly fearsome / pitiful, given the subject's context), and the troublesome argument would be blocked.

In the next section I shall attempt to show that the position sketched here is Aristotle's.

6. Aristotle on 'imitations' (*mimêseis*) and the real things.

Consider the following passage from *Politics* 8.

> *Everyone who listens to imitations (Gk.* μιμήσεων*) comes to have the corresponding emotions (*γίγνονται ... συμπαθεῖς*), even when the rhythms and melodies these contain are taken in isolation. And since music happens to be one of the pleasures, and virtue is a matter of enjoying, loving and hating in the right way, it is clear that nothing is more important than that one should learn to judge correctly and get into the habit of enjoying decent characters and noble actions. Rhythms and melodies contain the closest likenesses (*ἔστι δὲ ὁμοιώματα μάλιστα*) of the true natures of anger, gentleness, courage, temperance, and their opposites, and of all the other characters as well. The facts*

> *make this clear. For when we listen to such things, our souls are changed. But getting into the habit of being pained or pleased by likenesses (*ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις*) is close to being in the same state with regard to the real things (*πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν*). For example, if someone enjoys looking at an image (*εἰκόνα*) of something for no other reason than precisely because of its shape, he is bound to enjoy looking at the very thing whose image he is looking at.*
> *It happens, however, that other perceptible objects, such as those of touch or taste, contain no likeness (*ὁμοίωμα*) of the characters, although the objects of sight contain faint likenesses. For there are shapes that do contain such likenesses, to a limited extent, and everyone perceives them. Still they are not really likenesses of the characters; rather the shapes and colours that are produced are signs of characters, and are symptoms of emotional conditions.* (*Politics* 8.5, 1340a12-36)

The detailed interpretation of the passage is contested, and requires care. Nevertheless, a number of observations can be fairly securely made. Aristotle is clearly under no illusion that music by itself puts the listener into the presence of anger, gentleness, courage and the like (either their own or that of others). If so, then here in this one passage, Aristotle is expressing his approval of emotional responses both to "imitations" and to real things, while simultaneously marking the distinction between these – he does not think that being an imitation of x is a way of being x. This underscores the point made in section 4 above, that Aristotle does not disapprove of emotional responses to objects in mimetic works.

In Aristotle's account of why it is good for people, particularly the young, to engage emotionally with music, we may observe two significant features. The first is that this kind of response to musical *mimêseis* is a kind of 'habituation' in responding emotionally to such things as anger, gentleness, courage, temperance, and the like, such that – done correctly – it will habituate a person into the kinds of patterns of emotional response that will (in part) constitute character virtue. Clearly his view is that the patterns of emotional response that we develop in response to musical *mimêseis* (of courage, temperance, etc.) are transferable to real-life: they are the very same disposition as the disposition to respond with the same kind of emotion to the corresponding real-world objects (i.e. to real courage and temperance).[56] However, for these to be the very same

56 Quite how he thinks this works with music is a challenge to understand, especially given his emphasis on the rhythms and melodies (as contrasted with the lyrics). He clearly sees music as representational, providing "imitations" of psychological states on the basis of "the closest likenesses". One possible way of understanding what is happening here is that he thinks music stimulates an internal set of responses, reactions and resonances inside the listener that are like the internal states of (say) anger, courage, or temperance, such that one can get used to taking pleasure in these, as one listens to the right kind of music and thereby be training oneself to take pleasure in virtuous internal states (presumably, one could also be habituated to disliking the wrong kinds of music and thereby foster an aversion to the wrong kinds of emotions and psychological states in oneself). If this is correct, it would explain why he thinks music is so much better able than visual representations to offer likenesses of virtuous psychological states – music

disposition, they must be a disposition to respond to the very same range of objects, and sensitive in the right kinds of ways to whether the object presented really is an appropriate object of the affective state in question, e.g. pleasure. This looks as though it ought to include a sensitivity to whether an object of the right kind was *instantiated*. Aristotle's own comments in this passage suggest that he thinks that in the kind of emotional responses to music that he has in mind, the musical *mimêseis* must be "like" the corresponding real things in a very stringent way. Likenesses (ὁμοιώματα) are distinguished from "signs" (σημεῖα) and "symptoms" (χρώματα), and the latter Aristotle takes to be vastly less suitable for the kind of emotional habituation that he is commending in this passage. His analogy for the process he is commending is enjoying an image *for its shape*. Images and what they are images of differ in respect of most of their properties, but shape properties are the same between images and what they depict (an image of a bottle is the same shape as the bottle it is an image of). Aristotle seems to suppose that in order for the dispositions developed in response to music to be virtues or nascent virtues, they must be (or come as close as possible to being) responses to the same objects. On the view of supposition-based mimetic appreciation set out above, this would be so. Pity and fear responses to good tragedy would, like enjoying the right kind of music, be precisely responses to the very features that merit them – instantiated pitiful and fearsome things.

The second significant feature of Aristotle's explanation is that the kind of emotional response he has in mind here is what we might call 'standards-governed'. He envisages someone delighting in an image "because of its shape" (1340a25-6), i.e. responding *for a reason*. The musical appreciator here, and the appreciator of mimetic objects generally, is learning to be responsive to *certain features* of the things they appreciate, and to respond to them *because* they possess that feature. The musical equivalent of the shape example would be to enjoy a particular musical imitation "because it's courage", and presumably the equivalent in tragedy would be to fear or pity "because this is genuinely terrible" or "because this is genuinely pitiful". We might note here further that to respond to something *for a particular reason* is inherently to endorse the latter as a reason for responding in that way. Applied to tragedy, the correct kind of fear would be of something "because it is (instantiated as) something fearsome (unqualifiedly)", i.e. fearing something because of having discerned in it precisely the quality that merits the fear response. Correct fear, for the right reasons, would constitute an endorsement of the correct standards for feeling fear. If this is the right way to explicate and extend Aristotle's account of correct response to musical *mimêseis* in the *Politics* 8 passage, it is easy to see why he thinks the latter contributes to developing character virtues.

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puts the listener in contact with something like the inner structures of virtue, whereas visual art can only show what a virtuous person looks like from the outside. Cf. (Halliwell, 2002) 159-63. I am grateful to Catherine Rowett for a very helpful discussion of these issues.

We must now combine these two points with some further observations from *Poetics* 4 about how Aristotle understood human engagement with *mimêseis* quite generally.

> *In general, two causes seem likely to have given rise to the art of poetry, both of them natural. Imitation comes naturally to human beings from childhood (and in this they differ from other animals, i.e. in having a strong propensity to imitation and in learning their earliest lessons through imitation); so does the universal pleasure in imitations. What happens in practice is evidence of this: we take delight in viewing the most accurate possible images of objects which in themselves cause distress when we see them (e.g. the shapes of the lowest species of animal, and corpses). The reason for this is that understanding is extremely pleasant, not just for philosophers but for others too in the same way, despite their limited capacity for it. This is the reason why people take delight in seeing images: what happens is that as they view them they come to understand and work out what each thing is (e.g. 'this is so-and-so'). If one happens not to have seen them before, it will not give pleasure as an imitation, but because of its execution or colour, or for some other reason.* (*Poetics* 4, 1448b4-19)

This passage forms part of what Malcolm Heath has called Aristotle's "anthropology of poetry".[57] Aristotle here surveys a range of illustrative examples of how humans engage with mimetic works. His aim is not to give a detailed account of the psychological mechanisms by which this happens, but rather to show how natural to humans is not just the production but the use of and engagement with mimetic works. He presents the various forms of poetry, including tragedy, as continuous with these. If, therefore, it turns out that supposition-based engagement turns out to feature centrally in Aristotle's illustrations of the natural use of mimesis among humans generally, it would be very plausible to suppose (in the absence of any countervailing evidence) that this was how he understood the way audiences engaged with tragedy.

Aristotle's central illustrations are (1) children's mimetic play; (2) mimetic activity that distinguishes humans from other animals; (3) human learning from infancy; (4) pleasure taken in mimetic works; and sub-categories of the latter, (4a) pleasures of learning through recognition, and (4b) pleasure taken in images of things that would be unpleasant to engage with directly,[58] such as disgusting animals or corpses. All of these can be plausibly accounted for as cases where the engagement with mimetic works is supposition-based, and in some cases, this is clearly the most natural way to fill out the example. (1) We suppose that this is a tea party, I am the host, you are the guest, and these are pieces of cake, with a view to enacting further the events of the tea party. (2)

57 (Heath, 2012) 58, 72.

58 The above scheme gives the widest possible classification. It is possible to construe the text as implying that the pleasures of recognition are the explanation also of why the contemplation of images of unpleasant things is pleasant.

We suppose that the speaker is (say) Chryses, with a view to responding to what he says as the words of Chryses, or (in the case of the speaker) to making it the case that Chryses says such-and-such. (3) We suppose that these (structures made with small toy bricks) are buildings, and thereby learn that buildings fall down if they are too top-heavy. (4a) We suppose that this (scene in a painting or play) is ancient Argos after the Trojan war, and working it out from (say) his clothing and equipment, we recognise that *this* is Agamemnon! (4b) We suppose that this (image or model) is a cockroach and learn by close inspection that the cockroach's circulatory system is not connected to its respiratory system. Or we suppose that this (image) is a corpse outside Troy during the Trojan war, and working it out by close inspection (of his wounds or armour, perhaps), we recognise that this is Hector. Or we suppose that this (image) is a corpse of someone killed in battle, and learn by close inspection what are the effects of a sword wound to the abdomen.

The passage emphasises that the adult experience of such imitations is continuous with how people naturally behave "from childhood" and with the way humans "learn their earliest lessons" - phrases which are very naturally taken as referring to make-believe games and playing with toys. The contrast made here with other animals highlights that something more is intended than the widespread phenomenon of social learning in animals through copying behaviour. This points strongly in the direction of seeing such engagement with imitations as involving a supposition-based perspective. As Stephen Halliwell has put it, "Mimesis, in its artistic but also in some of its nonartistic forms, involves modeling particular media (in the case of children, their movements and words, along with their feelings of pleasure and pain) so as to produce an object or a form of behaviour that is intentionally significant of a piece of supposed or possible reality."[59]

Some of what we know of children's games in antiquity supports precisely this picture[60] – as today, children learned about building by playing with toy building bricks, or about farming by playing with imitation farm tools, about animals by playing with toy animals, or something about wheels, wagons and vehicles by playing with toy imitations of these things.[61] Of course, there can be play with these objects that does not involve pretending that they are the real thing, but the most natural way to understand what Aristotle has in mind, i.e. how a child "learns ... by imitations" that a sheep has a fluffy body or that horses have longer legs than goats, or that a wagon will roll down a

59 (Halliwell, 2002) 179.

60 Cf. (Oakley, 2003), noting particularly the discoveries in the archaeological record of toy animals and toy vehicles, from as early as the 10th century BCE onwards.

61 We find vestiges of these in the written record as well, including the philosophical literature: cf. Plato *Laws* 1, 643b-d for toy bricks, houses, farming tools, and playing at building and at farming (the Athenian Stranger's recommendations involving these need not exactly match widespread Greek cultural practice, but cannot represent a wholesale departure from it either); and Aristotle *De Motu* 7.701b4-6 for the toy wagon.

slope, or that a building will fall over if it is built too top-heavy, is that the child learns these things by the kind of play in which the imitations are looked upon as though they are the real thing, and as a result discoveries about the imitations are taken to be discoveries about the real things.

There are of course some features of this passage that might seem to tell against the idea that supposition-based activities (such as pretending) are central to human engagement with mimetic arts, as Aristotle understands it. He speaks of "working out" (συλλογίζεσθαι, b16) what each thing is,[62] which could be taken to imply a detached observer making connections between the imitation and the thing imitated, so as to conclude that "this is that", i.e. this is a picture of Ajax, or that dramatic enactment is of Cassandra. That is a possible interpretation, but not necessary. The suggestions given above about how Aristotle's examples might be filled out show clearly that "working out" is involved equally on the detached and on the involved (supposition-based) interpretation, so does not itself count in favour of one or the other. The issue turns on whether we should read "this is that" (1448b17) in the detached way just given, or as reporting the more involved perspective of someone who engages with the work on the basis of accepting that the context is the way the work represents it, and recognises within it a character or a corpse for who they are: "this is Agamemnon" or "that is Hector". Both are possible, but the latter seems somewhat more plausible to me. A more significant objection highlights that taking pleasure in images or cockroaches or corpses excludes the possibility that the subject supposes that the mimetic object is a cockroach or a corpse – if they did suppose that, they would be revolted. Their pleasure requires that they be insulated from any danger of contact with the corpse or cockroach. This important observation does not, however, count against a supposition-based account of how people engage with such works. Rather it highlights a subtlety in the content of what is supposed or imagined, when people engage with mimetic works in this way. They suppose that things are the way the work presents them (e.g. that here is a cockroach or a corpse), but not necessarily that they themselves are present in the same context. So, just as the audience member might suppose that "*this* is Agamemnon", without being committed to supposing that "I am six feet away from Agamemnon", similarly one might accept that this is a battlefield or that is a scene with a cockroach without thereby thinking of oneself as part of that context (nor of the cockroach or contents of the battlefield as being present next to oneself in the real world).[63]

Overall,[64] Aristotle's overview of human engagement with mimetic works in *Poetics* 4 gives a central

62 Cf. also *Rhetoric* 1.11, 1371b9-10.

63 Supposition involves the adoption of a perspective such that the world of the work is how things are, but does not necessarily involve representing the appreciator as an object within that world. Cf. (Walton, 1990) 57-61, ch. 6, esp. 213-20. And for a related distinction, cf. *De Mem.* 1, 450b11-451a2.

64 Note that this conclusion would stand, even if one conceded that one or two of Aristotle's examples were best understood in ways that were not supposition-based.

place to supposition-based modes of engagement, in ways that we would expect to carry over to tragedy. The next section shows how this understanding of human engagement with mimetic art can be applied, so as to open up a powerful explanation of the propriety of passionate responses to tragedy, and thereby disarm the paradox.

7. Disarming the Paradox

The formal solution

Formally, a paradox of fiction is avoided by amending the key premise in the argument that generated it from:

1 Pity and fear are correct responses only if their objects are "unqualifiedly" pitiable / fearsome (which requires their being instantiated).

to

1* Pity and fear are correct responses only if it is true that their objects are, given the subject's context, "unqualifiedly" pitiable / fearsome (which requires their being instantiated).

and the preceding arguments suggest that it is the latter that better represents Aristotle's position. Premise 3, amended correspondingly, can be safely denied, since in the relevant range of cases, the characters and events in the drama *are*, given the subject's 'context', unqualifiedly pitiable / fearsome. Audiences' emotional reactions are part of their supposition-based engagement with the mimetic work, and are appropriately evaluated within the context created by the suppositions made for that purpose.

The propriety of emotional responses to fiction

However, this solution will be more compelling if it can be shown how the view it ascribes to Aristotle preserves the thrust of the passages dealing with the propriety of emotional response, i.e. the views summarised in the original premise 1, and how pity and fear in response to tragedies are consistent with these.

Aristotle envisages audiences as engaging with mimetic works on the basis of supposing, for the purposes of appreciative engagement, that things are the way they are represented in the work. From that perspective, they feel pity and fear through having discerned pitiful and fearsome things within the work, where the pity and fear in question are felt *because of* those features. If so, these responses can be thought of as meeting and upholding the requirement that fear be of the (unqualifiedly) fearsome and pity be of the (unqualifiedly) pitiful, as follows. Firstly, when

audiences, engaging suitably with mimetic works, respond with pity and fear to things that are (in the work) unqualifiedly pitiful and fearsome, their responses activate and strengthen a quite general disposition to pity / fear all and only unqualifiedly pitiful / fearsome things. This is because, within the context created as part of their appreciative engagement with the work, those things *are* instantiated, and thus unqualifiedly pitiful / fearsome. The disposition in question is a constituent of character virtue. Secondly, when audiences pity / fear something *for the reason that it is pitiful / fearsome*, they endorse and commit themselves to a norm of pitying / fearing all and only the unqualifiedly pitiful / fearsome.

Do emotional responses to fiction retain a *pro tanto* defect?

Does this view still concede that, in pitying and fearing uninstantiated objects, audience emotions are still not fitting, and are to this extent are *pro tanto* defective responses, even if this is outweighed by the above merits? If it did, the resolution of the issue would be less than fully satisfying. But arguably it does not. On this view, the audience's capacities for pity and fear are functioning perfectly within the context in which they operate and given the contents of the supposed circumstances at which they are directed (i.e. the world of the drama). They are objectively not fitting (considered from outside the appreciator's perspective), but this it not a fault. The non-fittingness stems from the fact that the subject has, as described earlier, adopted a mode of engagement with the drama, which involves, for the purposes of appreciation, supposing that things are as they are represented in the work, including things known to be untrue. From within that perspective, i.e. on the supposition that things are that way, the characters and events in the drama *are* instantiated as fearsome (or pitiable, etc.), even though objectively-speaking they are not, since the suppositions involved in adopting that perspective are themselves false. The non-fittingness (treating what is not instantiated as though it were) is thus not some isolated mistake, a stray malfunctioning of their emotional apparatus. Rather it comes as part of what is involved in their supposition-based appreciation of the drama: it is a simple result of their adoption in the first place of the kind of perspective customarily involved in the appreciation of mimetic works. This supposition does involve a kind of systematic misrepresentation of how things are, but this is itself impeccable, a regular part of engagement with mimetic art. On this basis, we may attribute to Aristotle an understanding of the audience's emotional engagement with the *mimêseis* involved in tragedy that does not involve even a *pro tanto* defect. Emotional capacities function impeccably within a perspective appropriately adopted as part of the beneficial human practice of appreciating mimetic works. And in fact such emotional responses also serve to express the audience's commitment to the relevant norms governing emotional response, and strengthen their general disposition to comply with them.

If the above is right, then Aristotle's understanding of otherwise puzzling features of audience

responses to tragedy locates them within the broader phenomenon of the distinctively human practices of creating and engaging with *mimêseis*. The curious practices of poets, rhapsodes (highlighted by Plato in the *Ion*), actors and audiences, along with the practitioners and appreciators of other mimetic arts, all involve representations they may well know to be false. This suite of human practices, he makes clear in *Poetics* 4, is part of human nature, i.e. part of the successful natural functioning of human beings, and good for them to undertake.[65]

8. An objection

One might object that the resolution of the paradox proves too much. That misdirected emotions have beneficial longer-term consequences is not enough to make them appropriately felt. Suppose being afraid of the dark while safely at home in the evening had the longer-term effect of fostering a sensible and beneficial disposition to respond to danger and risks. This would not make that fear of the dark appropriately felt in the circumstances. If the basis proposed here for justifying tragic pity and fear would also vindicate fear of the dark while safely at home, it is unsatisfactory. But in fact it would not. The emotional responses of the audience are not defended simply on the basis of their effects: rather they are defended as *correct*, once a certain appreciative perspective has been adopted. Although supposition-based appreciation of mimetic works involves the wholesale adoption (for the purposes of appreciation) of such a perspective, which may include falsehoods, the adoption of this stance is itself justified by the benefits of engaging with mimetic works.[66] The question about the appropriateness or otherwise of their pity and fear should be posed *within* the scope of this perspective, since that is the context in which those emotional capacities are exercised.[67] Assessed in this way, the emotional responses are correct. Since the fear of the dark

65 It is worth noticing that there is something more puzzling about the engagement of audiences than there is about the practices of actors, authors and rhapsodes. The activity of actors, poets (as other creators of mimetic works) and rhapsodes serves to make it the case that things are thus and so in the work: the actor, for instance, is not best understood as responding *in propria persona* to the other characters and events in the work. By contrast, this is precisely what (on this understanding) the audience are understood as doing. One might see this as a weakness of Aristotle's position, and prefer a way of conceptualising audiences' responses to art in which the audience members do something much more like acting a role, playing the part of a fictionalised version of themselves within an appreciative game. Cf. (Walton, 1990) 57-61, 213-20. The case in which rhapsodes react emotionally to their own performances, playing the role of audience as well as performer, is thus a special case: cf. Plato's *Ion* 535b-d for Socrates' puzzlement at just such cases.

66 And indeed there may not even be any *prima facie* defect in adopting false suppositions, as indeed there is not in doing so with a view to counterfactual reasoning, playing the game of *Cluedo*, and many other practices.

67 Notice that since the appreciative perspective is adopted with a view to creating the context for exercising appreciative (including emotional) capacities, it is not that the emotional capacities respond to what is fearsome-in-the-tragedy. Rather, they are already operating within a perspective in which the characters and events within the tragedy are taken as giving the way things are, so the emotional responses will be to

happens simply in the real world, and involves no special perspective-taking as does engaging with a mimetic work, it would be assessed (as incorrect) in relation to how things really are (the subject is safe at home, the dark is not fearsome): thus the grounds for vindicating the emotions of theatre audiences do not serve to vindicate it.

9. The Significance of Aristotle's Position

The position developed here is of obvious significance in the history of puzzlement over emotional responses to fiction – a much longer history than is sometimes recognised. And it removes a potential blot on Aristotle's copy book for his failure to recognise the issue: if this interpretation is correct, he had no need to do so.

But beyond its historical importance, his view is of philosophical significance for its contribution to a key issue in aesthetics. Firstly, the paradox Aristotle succeeds in evading is a significantly tougher challenge than the 'paradox of fiction' usually discussed in aesthetics, because of his view that correct emotions are fitting, i.e. that their objects are instantiated. Secondly, the paradox is evaded with a more parsimonious set of philosophical resources than the leading rivals in contemporary aesthetics. In particular, Aristotelian audiences respond emotionally *in propria persona*, and there is no appeal to the playing of roles or to appreciative games, as there is in Waltonian approaches to this issue.

The third philosophical merit of Aristotle's position is its flexibility, and the explanatory power this yields. This can be shown by comparison with the rival proposals. In common with most recent approaches to avoiding a paradox of fiction, his view involves features that explain why audience emotions should be assessed relative to the way things are represented within the artistic work.[68] In non-Waltonian views, this is often done by something like acceptance of the way the work presents things, such as suspension (or "bracketing") of disbelief, or simulating.[69] The kind of acceptance required on the proposed understanding of Aristotle's view, also serves this function. However, this kind of acceptance, or supposition, has a significantly different functional role in the mind of the audience member than does suspension of disbelief or simulation. In relation to emotional response, the results of suspending disbelief or simulating play the same functional role as beliefs.[70]

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things *as fearsome (simpliciter)* and *because they are fearsome.*

68 (Walton, 1990), (Friend, 2003), (Meskin and Weinberg, 2003), (Gaut, 2007), (Todd, 2012).

69 e.g. (Meskin and Weinberg, 2003), (Todd, 2012). The present point aside, both views have a great deal in common with the position canvassed here.

70 "It does not matter whether that representation is in the BB [Belief Box] or in the PWB [Possible Worlds Box]" (Meskin and Weinberg, 2003) 32. Their functional role will differ from that of belief, of course, regarding its connection with decision-making and action.

This is what explains why entertaining the content of fictional works in either of those ways can cause audiences to respond emotionally. By contrast, the kind of acceptance involved in supposition-based appreciation is more flexible, because there is no single functional role it plays. For Aristotle, engaging with mimetic works is something humans can do in myriad different ways. There is the distress-free fascination with the depiction of corpses or creepy-crawlies, the comparatively dispassionate contemplation of a painted scene, and the passionate appreciation of good tragedy.[71] And correspondingly, one can "suppose" that things are the way they are represented in the work with a view to any of those ways of engaging with the work's represented content.[72] Though there is something functionally common to all cases (i.e. such engagement always involves *some* kind of "acceptance" *or another*, so as to take on *some or other* parts of the functional role of belief), the *exact* functional role involved in the way the imitation is taken up in any particular case will be determined by the nature of the engagement for which it creates the "context". And this will depend on a variety of factors, such as social expectations about how to engage with a work of this kind, psychological features of the appreciator, and sometimes audiences' choices about how to engage. The depiction of the corpse and the creepy-crawlies is accepted in a way that is tailored to contemplation and learning, but not to distress at the killing or at the creature's disgustingness. Whereas the situation of the tragedy is accepted in a way that engages the audience's capacities for pity and fear. Had Aristotle considered the game of *Cluedo*, he might have observed that the murder is accepted with a view to engaging players' capacities for working out how to solve the crime, but not to horrifying them at the killing.

This multi-faceted flexibility allows for considerable explanatory power. Although it doesn't itself explain why some kinds of engagement with *possibilia* arouse emotions and others don't, it doesn't render this puzzling either. For such an explanation, Aristotle's view could direct our attention to the variety of socially-developed ways he recognises in which humans engage with mimetic representations of *possibilia*, such as for storytelling, jokes, learning of various kinds, entertainment, games and so forth. Each of these has its own conventions for what particular range of capacities are to be employed in engaging with it (conventions the individual might defy, of course). It is here, the Aristotelian picture suggests, that we should seek explanations both of why people *do* and why they *should* have different kinds of reactions as a result of different kinds of contemplation of mimetic representations of *possibilia*. For those representations are accepted in each case with a view to a particular kind of engagement with them, and this gives that acceptance a significantly

71 *Poetics* 4, 1448b10-19; 6, 1449b22-28; *DA* 3.3, 427b23-4. Notice also that in some tragedies, the work may invite the audience to make suppositions that implicate the audience themselves in the action of the drama, in order, for example, to engage the audience in the kind of personally-involved guilt or horror at Euripides' *Trojan Women*, or Phrynichus' *Sack of Miletus*.

72 Depending on what kind of appreciative or responsive activity is envisaged, we tend to apply different terms to the activity of supposing, e.g. imagining, making-believe, hypothesising, pretending, etc..

different functional role in the various different cases.[73]

10. Conclusion

I have sought to show how a paradox of fiction can be plausibly seen as entailed by a set of claims about tragedy, audience responses to tragedy, and about correct emotional response, all of which have a good claim to be held by Aristotle. The paradox arises if Aristotle is thereby committed to saying that audience responses of pity and fear to (good) tragedy are defective emotional responses, since this runs counter to his evident endorsement of such responses in the *Poetics*, as the kind of responses that such audiences *should* have. The issue is rendered more puzzling because Aristotle shows no sign of awareness of the threat of any such paradox. On the view canvassed here, there is for Aristotle no defect involved in audience responses, because such emotional responses take place within the context of the kind of "supposition" involved in appreciative engagement with mimetic works of art. This is where, for the purposes of engaging with the work, audiences treat the way things are represented in the work as being the way things are. Although audiences respond to things (characters and events in the drama) that are not pitiful and fearsome things instantiated in their environment, these responses are correct, since they are appropriately judged within the context of the audience's supposition-based appreciation of the work. Within that perspective, the objects of these passions are indeed instantiated, and thus unqualifiedly pitiful and fearsome. As such, these emotional responses express and strengthen an endorsement of the standards of correctness governing such responses. The overall adoption of such a supposition-based appreciative perspective may be justified (if it needs justifying) by reference to the benefits it brings – pleasure, learning, and the development of dispositions to respond emotionally in an appropriately discriminating way, dispositions that are transferable from the theatre to the rest of life. This kind of appreciative engagement is, Aristotle believes, natural for humans – that is to say, it is part of a well-lived human life.

The position here attributed to Aristotle not only brings to light important historical resources for understanding "paradoxes of fiction", it also has much to commend it philosophically. For it offers a way to avoid such paradoxes using a comparatively parsimonious set of philosophical tools. And it makes available flexible and powerful resources for explaining why different kinds of representations of possible situations and events can and should elicit from us such different arrays of responses.

73 This implies the recognition of further varieties of acceptance beyond (though still in the spirit of) what is highlighted in (Bratman, 1992).

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