

7 Is there a *Poetics* in the *Politics*?

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Does Aristotle's *Politics* presuppose the *Poetics*? Aristotle's *Poetics* takes Attic tragedy as an exemplar of all the mimetic arts, and Attic tragedy was a decidedly political institution – an institution embedded in major civic religious festivals and one whose plots and characters often resonate with Athenian political culture. It seems hard to imagine that the author of an eight-book study of the fourth-century *polis* could be oblivious to the political nuances and institutional framework of the art form examined in the *Poetics*. Furthermore, the *Politics* appears to allude to the *Poetics* itself and indeed with respect to one of the most enigmatic topics within the *Poetics*, namely the nature of *catharsis*.¹ In his examination of music, Aristotle notes that *catharsis* – in this context, apparently the *catharsis* of religious music which purifies religious frenzy – is one of the benefits of music but he refuses to elaborate on the phenomenon and instead promises to return to the topic in his work on poetics (*en tois peri poiētikēs* [*Pol.* 8.7.1341b39–40]).² Although the last book of the *Politics* ends abruptly and the text is fragmentary, its discussion of music as a mimetic art seems to overlap with the analysis of mimetic art in the *Poetics*. Given the political nature of Attic tragedy and the overlapping analyses of mimetic art in the two works, it seems hard to imagine that the *Politics* is conceptually or analytically independent of the *Poetics*.

Two scholarly debates complicate my question. First, Aristotle's *Poetics* is almost entirely silent about the political context and content of the tragedies which it analyzes. Indeed, the *Poetics*' silence about the institutional setting of tragedy has led Edith Hall to go so far as to claim that Aristotle "cuts the umbilical cord which has tied poetry so firmly to the city state."³ As Malcolm Heath has shown – in a piece which inspired the title of my chapter – Hall's view goes too far insofar as it fails to recognize the place of Aristotle's philosophical anthropology – including ethical and political norms – immanent within the *Poetics*.⁴ But even if Heath is correct to say that Hall's image of a "divorce" between tragedy and the *polis* misconstrues their relationship, the *Poetics*' silence on the performative and political elements of Attic tragedy is in need of explanation. Such an unexplained silence limits the relevance of the *Poetics* to the *Politics* to abstract or general claims about the philosophical anthropology which both works presuppose.

A second debate concerns the extent of the conceptual or analytical overlap between the *Poetics* and *Politics*. Although the last book of the *Politics* which we possess is clearly incomplete (it includes unfulfilled textual promissory notes and ends quite abruptly), the mimetic art which it analyzes is music or *mousikē*.⁵ Scholars debate whether *mousikē* should be construed narrowly – as concerning only the training of young men in the performance, listening, and judging of instrumental music (which is the explicit topic of *Politics* 8) – or whether it should be construed broadly, as carrying implications for the educational use of works from the other realms of the muses, for instance those of epic, tragedy, and comedy. Carnes Lord, for instance, has argued that *Politics* 8 contains a general theory of civic literary and tragic culture whose omission of an explicit discussion of tragedy is the result of the book’s incompleteness.⁶ More recently, Andrew Ford has sought to “put the music back into *Politics* 8” by arguing that foisting central doctrines of the *Poetics* upon the *Politics* obscures and misconstrues Aristotle’s teaching about instrumental music as a prototypical liberal art.⁷ At the end of the *Politics*, there is certainly a voice for a musical education with a public or community component, but it seems far less than the political institutionalization of tragedy which some have thought inspires the *Poetics*, especially in contrast to the exile of the poets one finds in Plato’s *Republic*.⁸

Unfortunately, identifying what Aristotle might have said in the second half of *Politics* 8 is an almost entirely speculative exercise. Instead, I would like to argue that both of the features which we find in *Politics* 8 – its absence of any explicit discussion of tragedy as a public institution and its delimitation of public artistic education to instrumental music for citizens up through the age of 21 – are explainable on the basis of an explicit and central doctrine from the *Poetics*, namely that a drama can produce the function of tragedy independent of public performance and that, indeed, the performance of a drama may tend towards boorish or illiberal effects which actually impede the function of tragedy. Although I am hardly the first to notice Aristotle’s criticisms of the performative elements of tragedy, such a point seems to have been underappreciated in considering the relationship between the *Poetics* and *Politics*.⁹ I would like to argue that the influence of the *Poetics* upon the *Politics* is largely negative because the **former** defends a view of tragedy which de-emphasizes performance and shares with the *Politics* a central concern about the illiberal effects of performative arts in general upon the citizens of an ideal polis. Put succinctly, the attitude of the *Poetics* towards performance implies a political criticism of tragedy as a political or public institution albeit not as a private or non-performed one.¹⁰ Aristotle’s criticisms of democratic Athens in the *Politics* have a parallel in his criticisms of the pre-eminent performative art form of that democracy. At the same time, the concerns about performance which the *Poetics* raises can be met by a form of musical education, one which even includes limited training in performing

instrumental music. On my reading, Aristotle's *Politics* and *Poetics* together retain tragedy as a central "cultural" institution for the liberally educated citizen, a view completely consistent with everything Aristotle defends about tragedy in the *Poetics*. But *Politics* 8 displaces tragedy as the pre-eminent form of public education and in its place supplies instrumental music – no doubt much to the consternation of Athenian democrats both historically and their kindred spirits in contemporary drama and classics departments. What we take for granted – school plays, drama contests, performing before a classroom as integral parts of a young person's schooling – appears entirely absent from Aristotle's program for education up through the age of 21 years.

To support the claim that the influence of the *Poetics* upon the *Politics* is largely negative, I first examine what I will call the predicament of performance in the *Poetics*. Although the *Poetics* clearly identifies tragedy as an enacted mimetic art which incorporates spectacle as a part, I will argue that spectacle is unnecessary for the production of tragic function. In the second part of my chapter I consider the overlap between the *Poetics* and *Politics* 8 concerning the effects of performance and argue that both works share a fundamental concern about how the performance of art alters the educational and cultural effects of civic art. For a number of reasons, Aristotle thinks that educating youth in musical performances can escape the predicament of performance. My chapter concludes by articulating and speculating about why music eclipses tragedy as the pre-eminent form of liberal arts education in Aristotle's best regime.

7.1 The predicament of performance in the *poetics*

Aristotle's *Poetics* displays a profound ambivalence about the artistic value of performance and "spectacle" (*opsis*) in his analysis of tragedy.¹¹ On the one hand, Aristotle distinguishes tragedy from other forms of mimetic art by means of its mode or manner of *mimesis*¹²: whereas, for instance, epic represents actions through narration, tragedy does so through enactment.¹³ Since tragedy represents people acting, the "ornament of spectacle" (*ho tēs opseōs kosmos*) will necessarily be a part of tragedy (6.1449b32–33; cf. 1450a10, a13) and all tragedians have used spectacle as a part of tragedy (6.1450a13). On the other hand, as Aristotle makes clear both in *Poetics* 6 and 14, spectacle is most artless and least related to the poetic art (6.1450b17–18, 14.1453b7–11). Aristotle's point is not that spectacle is ineffective or irrelevant to tragedy: he explicitly claims that spectacle is enthralling (*psuchagōgikon* [6.1450b16–17]) and that it is capable of producing what is fearful and pitiable (14.1453b1–2, 7–8). But Aristotle's dismissal of spectacle opens the way for his repeated claim that good tragedy is able to perform its function without enactment.

In *Poetics* 6, Aristotle makes the initial claim that the power of tragedy exists without performance or actors; the effects of spectacle, he claims

rather dismissively, are more dependent upon the art of costumery than that of poetry (6.1450b18–20). A parallel passage in *Poetics* 14 elaborates:

That which is fearful and pitiable can arise from spectacle, but it can also arise from the structure of the incidents itself; this is superior and belongs to the better poet. For the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, someone who hears about the incidents will shudder and feel pity at the outcome, as someone may feel upon hearing the plot of the *Oedipus*. To produce this by means of spectacle is less artful and is the work of the sponsor of the chorus (*chorēgias*). Those who use spectacle to produce what is only monstrous (*to teratōdes*) and not fearful have nothing in common with tragedy.

(1453b1–10)

Aristotle's twice-repeated allusion to hearing (1453b5, 6) makes clear that he doesn't necessarily have in mind that tragedy should only be read; rather, he seems to envision a good tragic plot as being able to achieve the function of and produce the pleasure of tragedy through oral recitation.¹⁴ But that is entirely different from theatrical spectacle, which has more to do with what the sponsor of the chorus (*chorēgia*) can afford for competition and less (or indeed nothing) to do with the art of poetry. The production of shudders and ahas by means of "special effects" can be alien to the function and pleasure of poetry itself.¹⁵

Aristotle's critique of spectacle is not delimited to the artless thrills that come from special effects. Throughout the *Poetics*, Aristotle separates the art of poetry from any of the performative arts so as to determine its distinctive function. As noted in *Poetics* 6, Aristotle distinguishes the effects of the art of costumery from those related to the art of poetry. In *Poetics* 19, he does the same with respect to the art of delivery, namely the vocal art of the actor (*hupokritikē* [19.1456b10]).¹⁶ Just as the art of costumery has no bearing on the art of poetry, so too is knowledge of the art of acting irrelevant to the art of poetry.¹⁷ Elsewhere in the *Poetics* Aristotle is critical of poets who adapt their plays to pander to audiences or the strengths of individual actors and in doing so abandon the centrality of plot in achieving the function of tragedy.¹⁸ Bad poets, of course, who don't know any better, write episodic plots which lack a unifying thread between scenes; but more problematic is that good poets compose as "competition pieces" such poorly connected plots on behalf of actors (*agōnismata* [9.1251b37]).¹⁹

Tragedies can fulfill the *ergon* or function of tragedy or produce the pleasure unique to tragedy through the invocation of pity and fear by means of plot alone, and such fulfillment does not require the production or enactment of the play. With respect to the *ergon* or function of tragedy, Aristotle claims that plot is more important than diction and reasoning and that successful plot construction – for instance, the successful arrangement of changes of fortune or the best composition of incidents – is most important

(6.1450a30, 13.1452b29). In his analysis of epic and tragedy, Aristotle goes so far to say that tragedy can produce its effect and have its characteristic vividness even when it is only read (26.1462a11–14, 17–18).

By contrast, the production of tragedy on the stage encourages “boorish” (*phortikē*) responses because of the nature of the audience.²⁰ In an extended contrast between epic and tragedy concerning which genre is superior, *Poetics* 26 claims:

If the less boorish art is superior, and if this is always the one addressed to a superior audience, evidently the art which represents everything is utterly boorish: here, in the belief that the spectators do not notice anything unless the performer stresses it, the actors engage in profuse movements [...] Well, tragedy is like this [...] People say that epic is addressed to decent spectators who have no need of gestures, but tragedy to crude spectators; if then, tragedy is boorish, it will evidently be inferior.

(1461b27–30, 32–3, 1462a2–4)²¹

Admittedly, Aristotle’s discussion in *Poetics* 26 is dialectical, and after presenting arguments for the superiority of epic to tragedy he will do the same for the superiority of tragedy to epic. Furthermore, as we know from Plato’s lampoon of rhapsodes in the dialogue *Ion*, the same charge can be made against the delivery of epic poetry.²² But Aristotle’s main response to the claim that tragedy is boorish consists in separating out once again the poetic art from the actor’s art: the “charge” of boorishness is a matter of the art of performance (*hupokritikē*) rather than the art of poetry (26.1462a5–6). Aristotle’s defense of poetry against the charge of boorishness requires the purification, as it were, of tragedy as a form of *mimesis* capable of fulfilling its function without performance. Although Aristotle is obviously well aware that tragedy is a public institution historically embedded in enacted dramatic contests, the *Poetics* as a whole elevates its literary components at the cost of its performative components; the latter he thinks are ultimately inessential to the understanding of a drama.²³ Such a lesson about the nature of tragedy seems central to the *Poetics*; it also seems to stand at the heart of Aristotle’s treatment of musical education in the *Politics*.

7.2 The predicament of performance in *politics* 7–8

Politics 7–8 present a continuous, if sometimes fragmentary and ultimately incomplete, depiction of what Aristotle characterizes variously as his “best constitution” (*aristē politeia*) or city “in accord with one’s prayers” (*kat’ euschēn*),²⁴ namely a political organization that presupposes the optimal material conditions such as the ethnic nature of its inhabitants, its population size, and its geographical proximity to material resources and potentially hostile neighbors.²⁵ *Politics* 7.13 is a turning point of sorts within the text which is conventionally (and artificially) divided into two books: *Politics* 7.4–12 is

concerned with the various material conditions for the best regime; but *Politics* 7.13 through 8.7 is concerned with the question of what sort of education (*paideia*) will make the citizens of the best city good or virtuous so that they can participate in the city-wide (or at least citizen-wide) happiness at which the best regime aims. Its analysis range over the importance of leisure (*scholē*) in the best regime (7.14–15), proper guidelines for breeding and procreation (7.16), early childhood education in the household (7.17), and finally the problems and goals of subsequent public education (*Politics* 8).

It is worth underscoring that Aristotle's discussion of musical education takes place within the framework of his analysis of public education for children between the ages of 7 and 21 for two different reasons. First, *Politics* 8.1 articulates what I will call the "safeguard principle," namely that education should be suited to the particular nature of the regime in which it takes place since it both safeguards the regime and prepares its citizens to share or participate in that regime.²⁶ The "safeguard principle" is worth emphasizing because Aristotle is not proposing a regime of education in general or for any possible political organization. In his best regime, citizens need to be educated both to rule and be ruled according to their age: as young men, its citizens will exercise virtue (especially the martial virtues of courage and endurance) under the subordination of their elders; when they are older, they then need to possess the proper characteristics which allow them to flourish while ruling others (7.14.1332b15–16, b41-33a3). Although such a regime obviously involves political participation on the part of all citizens, it does not follow that the citizens are being prepared to flourish in a democracy. Indeed, within Aristotle's framework, democracy is a form of deviant regime and the education appropriate to safeguarding a democracy will be entirely different from the education prescribed for the best regime. Put otherwise: civic productions of tragedy at Athenian religious festivals may be one paradigm of civic education; but it hardly follows, on Aristotle's guidelines, that every regime – or even the best regime – should include tragedy as part of its civic education.

Second, *Politics* 8.1 articulates what I will call the "communal principle," namely that since the whole city has a single end – namely happiness – education should be one and the same for all and its supervision (*epimeleia*) should be communal (*koinē*) rather than private (1337a21–6).²⁷ Aristotle's discussion of musical education is not an exhaustive account of all the culture which will be permitted or nourished within the city, but rather it specifies what will be communal training for young men prior to the age of 21 which will prepare them not only for participating in the communal political activity of the best regime, but also for partaking of both communal and private forms of culture.²⁸ Aristotle makes the point most clearly when he notes that young children should not be exposed to obscene images (except within the framework of statuary appropriate to specific gods) or to obscene language in iambus and comedy "until they have reached the age when it is appropriate for them to recline at the common table and drink wine, and their education has rendered them immune to the harm such things can do"

(*Pol.* 7.17.1336b20–3). Aristotle’s remark about comedy – one of the only remarks in the entire *Politics* about dramatic forms of the arts²⁹ – makes clear that public displays of obscenity and mockery is inappropriate for children of a certain age; but that viewing comedy is delimited to a certain age group implies that it is not limited to other age groups.³⁰ The communal principle specifies what everyone in the best regime will participate in together as part of their education; it by no means precludes enjoying other forms of culture or drama either in private or in public.³¹ But whatever education is consistent with the communal principle must also prepare an individual to participate in the both communal and non-communal forms of culture which an individual will find in the best regime.

Although the “safeguard” and “communal” principles impose constraints upon what will serve as education in the best regime, Aristotle himself articulates what he calls the one principle or starting point of all else (*archē pantōn mia* [8.3.1337b32]) when considering education – and what I will call the “principle of leisure” – namely that education aims at developing a capacity for noble leisured activity (*scholazein dunasthai kalōs* [1337b31–32]). As the remainder of *Politics* 8 shows, Aristotle thinks that musical education – including education in how to perform music – provides such a paradigmatic liberal art because it habituates one to take pleasure in what is fine and prepares one to judge properly wherein consists truly noble leisure.³² Although it seems clear that Aristotle thinks that reading tragedy and epic are forms of noble leisurely activity, the problem of *Politics* 7–8 concerns what prepares one best to appreciate and enjoy such literary works. And indeed, Aristotle uses the testimony of Odysseus himself (in the banquet scenes from *Odyssey* 9 and 18 in which Odysseus invokes the bard)³³ to show that music is a form of activity pursued neither because it is necessary for life, nor because it is useful, nor that it promotes health, but rather because it is pursued solely for the purpose of leisure (8.3.1338a13–23).

To articulate Aristotle’s “principle of leisure,” it is necessary to explore his distinction between liberal (*eleutheron*) or “free” leisure activity and what is illiberal (*aneleutheron*) or what is vulgar (*banauson*).³⁴ Aristotle characterizes what is illiberal or vulgar in two different systematic ways. First, Aristotle notes twice that illiberality does not concern a kind of action (*praxis*) but the reason why someone performs the action. For instance, in his discussion of how citizens in his best regime will learn to rule and be ruled, Aristotle notes that

some commands differ not with respect to the tasks they assign but with respect to that for the sake of which they are done. That is why it is noble even for free young men to perform many of the tasks that are held to be appropriate for slaves. For the difference between noble and shameful actions does not lie so much in the acts themselves as in their ends, on that for the sake of which they are performed.

(*Pol.* 7.14.1333a6–10)

Learning how to be ruled requires learning how to obey commands for the right reasons, and education needs to prepare one to distinguish those reasons. Another passage later in *Politics* 8 articulates the same distinction more specifically. In seeking to classify what is liberal, Aristotle notes that

what one acts or learns for also makes a big difference. For what one does for one's own sake, for the sake of friends, or on account of virtue is not unfree, but someone who does the same thing for others would often be held to be acting like a hired laborer or slave.

(2.1337b16–20)

To use an example which Aristotle will provide subsequently: there is nothing intrinsically illiberal about performing music. But if one performs that music pandering to the boorish pleasure of an audience or for the sake of money rather than to develop virtue, then the musical performance is illiberal or vulgar (6.1341b8–18).

A second way that Aristotle characterizes illiberal or vulgar actions concerns the effects which those actions have upon us. Thus, Aristotle claims that

vulgar is any task, craft, or branch of learning if it renders the body or mind of free people useless for the practices and activities of virtue. That is why the crafts that put the body into a worse condition and work done for wages are culled vulgar; for they debase the mind and deprive it of leisure.

(2.1337b9–13)

This and other passages have led many to see in Aristotle's account of the vulgar a class prejudice – namely one which disapproves (quite problematically for us, given our economic system) of the notion of wage labor.³⁵ Although Aristotle certainly associates vulgarity with economic class – especially elsewhere in the *Politics* within his discussions of citizenship³⁶ – what is striking in *Politics* 7–8 is that his account of vulgarity is primarily addressed as a criticism of the Spartan system of public education. Aristotle characterizes the Spartan *agōgē* as the sole form of communal public education extant in his time but one which brutalizes its citizens, stunts their development, and leaves them woefully unprepared to exercise leisure – an inherent violation of his principle of leisure.³⁷ Spartans are “like an iron sword, they lose their edge when they remain at peace” (7.14.1334a8–9). If the Spartans personify vulgar, illiberal education which is narrowly utilitarian and leaves them totally unprepared for the noble exercise of leisure during peacetime, then how does Aristotle's notion of a musical education compare?

Politics 8.5 takes up the question of the power of music and considers whether it consists in education (*paideia*), amusement (*paidia*), or leisured pursuits (*diagōgē*).³⁸ Although Aristotle immediately notes that it is

reasonable to think that music participates in all three, in several places (e.g., 7.3.1337b28–32, 8.5.1340a1–10) he argues against the belief that the sole power or purpose of music is amusement or pleasure. Aristotle claims in response that music is mimetic or imitative and that everyone who listens to it comes to have the emotions which it imitates even when rhythms and melodies are taken in isolation.³⁹ He adds that

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 (*to krinein orthōs* [1340a17]) and get into the habit of enjoying decent characters and noble actions.

(8.5.1340a14–18)⁴⁰

Musical education seems to have both “ethical” (in the sense of related to the habituation of the non-rational part of the soul) and “intellectual” components.⁴¹ Aristotle’s discussion of the proper development of enjoying, loving, and hating – which goes to the heart of what the *Ethics* calls developing a love of the fine⁴² – shows that music is capable of ethical habituation. But his invocation of “proper judgment” is more broadly aesthetic in the sense of being perceptually aware and attuned. No doubt, the aesthetic and ethical components of musical education combine in a single individual. But what seems crucial to the elevation of music as the pre-eminent liberal art is that it prepares one to share nobly in leisure in precisely the opposite fashion as the Spartan vulgar education.⁴³ Spartan education certainly trains the soul to experience certain emotions and desires (rather like those of the timocratic soul in the *Republic*), but it fails to inculcate the critical abilities of judgment or discernment.⁴⁴ By contrast, Aristotle highlights performative musical education precisely because it trains not only the desiring part of the soul, but also its discerning part.

Aristotle grants in several places that a musical education inculcates a critical ability to judge well,⁴⁵ but within the text he appears to envision once again a debate between Spartan musical education and that which Aristotle will advocate specifically with respect to the initial aporia of *Politics* 8.5, viz. whether musical education includes a performative element. In his dialectical consideration of whether and how one should participate in music, Aristotle notes that even if music is able to improve people’s character (*ta ēthē*):

Why should [children] learn it themselves, rather than being like the Spartans, who enjoy the music of others in the right way and are able to judge it (*dunasthai krinein* [1339b1])? For the Spartans do not learn it themselves, but are still able, so they say (*hos phasi* [1339b3]), to judge rightly (*krinein orthōs* [1339b3]) which melodies are good and which are not.

(8.5.1339a41-b4)

The verbal echoes of *Politics* 8.6 make clear that Aristotle does not endorse this *endoxon* concerning Spartan abilities. Instead, Aristotle claims

It is not difficult to see, of course, that if someone takes part in performance himself, it makes a great difference in the development of certain qualities, since it is difficult if not impossible to become excellent judges of performance (*tōn ergōn kritas genesthai spoudaiou*) if they do not take part in it.

(8.6.1340b22–5)

Proper judgment of music requires some familiarity with the performance of music, and as the sequel shows, proper performance trains one to listen not only critically for musical education, but for education of any sort (8.6.1341a19–21). There is no predicament that musical performance is part of a proper education. Rather, the predicament concerns how to insure that such a performative musical education avoids the development of vulgar musicians.

The remainder of *Politics* 8.6–7 consists in a reply to “some people” who object that performing music inevitably makes one vulgar (*banau-son*). Aristotle’s reply consists of a threefold answer (sketched in outline at 1340b42–41a3). First, instrumental education should be limited to developing the ability to enjoy fine melodies and rhythms (1341a14), but it should exclude preparation for professional competition (*pros tous agōnas tous technikous* [1341a10]). Second, instrumental education should use only those instruments that make one a good listener (1341a20–1), but it should exclude training in professional instruments or those which aim at competition (1341b8–10).⁴⁶ Finally, education should be limited to proper melodies and rhythms (the complicated topic of the incomplete *Politics* 8.7), which seem to be limited to the Dorian and perhaps also the Lydian melodies.⁴⁷

Aristotle provides a good summation of the three parts of his response by distinguishing between vulgar and liberal education for instrumental performance. The vulgar performer takes up learning instrumental music for the sake of pandering to the audience’s boorish pleasure and, in doing so, literally stunts himself physically by trying to respond bodily to the movements which the audience demand. Such an education in instrumental music both impedes the development of proper habits (since it transforms an educational moment into an exercise in professional pandering and economic exchange) and incapacitates the gymnastic and bodily development required of political virtue in the best regime.

7.3 Conclusion

Although there are numerous ways in which the *Poetics* and *Politics* intersect, by means of a conclusion I would like to focus on the three reasons – each of which corresponds with a principle I have enumerated above – that I believe motivate Aristotle to exclude tragedy from public education in *Politics* 8.

The first principle I identified – the “safeguard principle” of *Politics* 8.1 – specifies that the public education of the best regime must prepare citizens of the best regime to rule and be ruled in the best regime. Aristotle is clear in numerous places that musical education is capable of educating the ethical habits and judgment of its citizens – both through habituation and through exercising discernment – so that they are able to exercise leisurely pursuits in noble fashion. Such a point is crucial because the best regime, even though it includes political participation, provides leisure to its citizens. The “safeguard principle” precludes public education in tragedy because although drama engages our ethical habits and judgments, tragedy by itself seems incapable of preparing us for other forms of leisure. At least according to Aristotle, music – although intrinsically worth pursuing – is also a good preparation for other leisurely pursuits; but viewing or reading tragedy seems to lack that preparatory element, in part because of its far greater complexity than music. Tragedy may be the capstone of a liberal education (and the missing chapters of *Politics* 8 may have developed that idea), but it does not follow that it should be part of the elementary components of that education. Simply put, music prepares the citizens of the best regime to enjoy the leisured pursuit of music and other forms of *mousikē*; it is unclear that tragedy could perform the same function.

The second or “communal” principle which I extracted from *Politics* 8.1 entails that since the end of the best regime is one and the same for all, there should be a form of communal or public education for all citizens. Communal education brings individuals together and prepares them individually to seek common goods. Public performance of the arts seems ideally suited to such a communal endeavor since it is an instance in which individuals come together to form an audience – something which is more than the sum of its parts.⁴⁸ Both the *Politics* and *Poetics* are concerned with the potentially vulgar effects of musical and tragic performance. Although Aristotle never compares their respective pitfalls, I have argued that whereas the *Poetics* “excises” the performative elements of tragedy – and in effect changes it into a non-communal literary art form, rather than a communal performed one – the *Politics* inoculates, as it were, musical performance by allowing young men and women to study music by means of performance, but not in performative competition.⁴⁹ It seems fair to ask why one could not do the same for tragedy – for instance, allow non-professional participation in drama productions but excluding citizens from competitions. Although my answer is speculative, I suspect that using one’s “self” – one’s own voice and bodily movements – in acting to portray a character is simply more “dramatic” and soul-affecting than musical performance, in which the musical object imitated is more abstract and is ultimately mediated through an instrument. Humans are mimetic beings who take on aspects of what we imitate (hence Aristotle’s claim that even in childhood play, the future citizens of the best regime should be directed towards the imitation of serious objects and insulated from those which are slavish [*Pol.* 7.17.1336b28–30, 40–1]). Perhaps

Aristotle fails to incorporate non-competitive theatrical activities because of the almost intimate connection between an actor and his role.

Aristotle's own *archē* concerning education – the “leisure principle” that states that education needs to prepare one to be able to exercise leisure nobly – picks out musical education as one which prepares one better to appreciate and distinguish between noble and ignoble leisurely pursuits. At one point, Aristotle notes that learning to play a musical instrument will make citizens “good listeners, whether to musical education or to education of any other sort” (8.6.1341a19–21). The trope of being a good “auditor” – either in the training of that part of the soul which listens to reason or in the ability to be able to “listen” to Aristotle’s works, which take the literary form of lectures – runs deep in Aristotle’s thinking.⁵⁰ No doubt tragedy attunes one to visual spectacle, emotional resonances, and comprehension of complex plot developments. But all those elements (save visual spectacle) presuppose an audience of careful auditors. Learning how to listen comes first, but if listening is learned adequately, all the rest can follow in its train. But one must crawl before one walks, and learning how to listen to instrumental music comes before learning how to “listen” to all the elements of a tragedy. Insofar as liberal education prepares one for all other forms of learning, learning how to listen comes first.⁵¹

Notes

- 1 See further, Heath forthcoming, which the author has kindly shared with me in draft. The literature on Aristotle’s treatment of *catharsis* is formidable; Ford (2004, 309–10) provides a brief survey of the debate.
- 2 References within my paper to Greek texts derive from Ross (1957) (for the *Politics*) and Kassel (1965) (for the *Poetics*). Although translations within the text are my own, they are much indebted to Reeve (1998), Halliwell (1995), and Janko (1987). I am also much indebted to Kraut (1997) – which I generally found supportive of my argument – even if I have cited it infrequently.
- 3 Hall (1996, 302). For more recent criticism of Hall’s position, see Hanink (2011, 321–4).
- 4 Heath (2009, 468–85).
- 5 See, for instance, *Pol.* 8.2.1337b24, b27, 8.3.1338a14, 8.5.1339a11.
- 6 Lord (1982, 29, 146–50).
- 7 Ford (2004, 309).
- 8 See, for instance, S.G. Salkever (1986). Ford (2015a, 5–15) contests the claim that the *Poetics* responds to the criticisms of poetry in the *Republic*. Instead, he claims that Aristotle’s main disagreement with Plato (at least as expressed in the *Poetics*) concerns the notion of artistic inspiration articulated in Plato’s *Ion* (536bc). An unpublished epilogue (which the author kindly shared with me) to Schofield (2010) argues that the main target of *Politics* 7/8 on music is *Laws* 2, but compare Destrée (2018).
- 9 Konstan (2013), for instance, is an exemplary analysis of spectacle (*opsis*) in the *Poetics*, but it neglects to consider the broader political and educational context of Aristotle’s critique of performance. Konstan (2013, n. 1 63–4) details recent scholarship that has considered Aristotle’s critique of spectacle. More recently, Destrée (2016a) has argued, contrary to “the almost undisputed *communis*

- opinio*,” that spectacle and music (which is a part of spectacle) are crucial components of tragedy for Aristotle.
- 10 I am in agreement with Ferrari that the *Poetics* is not “political” in its take on tragedy but I think he is insufficiently attentive to the political reasons, as it were, that the *Poetics* is not political. Yes, “tragedy is plot for plot’s sake” (Ferrari 1999, 183), but in part that is because of the vulgar effect of performance. Ford (2015a, 12–13) argues that Aristotle’s claim that poetic “rightness” is different from that of “political” rightness (*Poet.* 25: 1460b13–15) supports a qualified notion of autonomy for the art of poetry independent of politics.
 - 11 For a good overview of the problem of spectacle in the *Poetics*, see Appendix 3 “Drama in the theatre: Aristotle on ‘spectacle’ (*opsis*)” in Halliwell (1998, 337–43).
 - 12 For *tropon* see *Poet.* 1.1447a18; cf. *to hōs* 3.1448a19, a25, 6.1450a11.
 - 13 *Poet.* 3.1448a21–4, 6.1449b26–7, 22.1459a15–16; cf. 5.1449b11; cf. Destrée (2016a, 232–4).
 - 14 At *Politics* 8.3, Aristotle approvingly adduces Odysseus’ invocation of the bard as a model of musical, as a leisurely pursuit (*diagōgē*); his examples derive from a bard using music to recite epic narrative, not enact a scene. Aristotle refers to the scenes of *Odyssey* 17.382–5 (albeit including a line not in our *Odyssey*) and *Odyssey* 9.7–8.
 - 15 Sifakis (2013, 56–7) argues that although spectacle is not a part of the poet’s art, it remains a central part of tragedy and not something Aristotle dismisses. Such a claim fits well with Ford (2015a, 14–18), which argues that the *Poetics* is a work of literary criticism rather than a guide for playwrights. But both Sifakis and Ford seem to underestimate the concerns Aristotle raises in *Pol.* 8 about the deleterious effects of performance upon the performer (leaving aside its effects upon the audience).
 - 16 When considering potential criticisms one might raise against the use of diction in poetry, Aristotle claims that understanding the various forms of diction belongs to the *technē hupokritikē*; but, he continues, “knowledge or ignorance of [this art] can support no serious criticism of the art of poetry” (19.1456b13–15).
 - 17 *Rhetoric* 3.1 provides guidance about the art of *hupokrisis* as a form of voice management relevant both to actors and orators. For its place as part of the “actor’s art” (see Sifakis 1986, 155–8).
 - 18 Wise (2008) argues that Aristotle mistakenly characterizes tragedy as consisting in predominantly “sad-endings” due to the rise of fourth-century celebrity actors who recast the performance of fifth-century plays; thus, “Aristotle’s theory of tragedy mistakes a celebratory political art for a weepy histrionic one” (384). Aristotle’s explicit remarks about the influence of “celebrity actors” belie some of Wise’s suggestion that Aristotle was unaware of the effect of such actors. But, in general, her characterization of the *Poetics* as a work which privileges “sad-ending tragedy” understates the importance of “happy-ending” tragedies (which Wise acknowledges that Aristotle discusses at *Poet.* 14: 1453b34–54a8). For additional criticism of Wise’s overstatement (see Hanink 2011).
 - 19 Destrée (2016a, 234–5), is correct to note that part of Aristotle’s criticism of spectacle concerns bad actors rather than spectacle per se (e.g., 1461b34–6). But that does not resolve the problem I identify, namely the situation of good poets who write plays catering to spectacle.
 - 20 In *Politics* 7.17.1336b28 Aristotle approves of the practice of the tragic actor Theodoros who refused to let an audience hear someone else play his part first, since the audience would irrationally like best whatever they heard first, regardless of the quality of the subsequent acting. Concerning the “boorish” effects of audience, see also *Politics* 8.6.1341b10–18.

21 For recent discussion of Aristotle's attitudes towards potentially different audiences (see Bouchard 2012).

22 See *Poet.* 26.1462a6. Compare the rhapsode's claim in Plato's dialogue (*Ion* speaking):

Listen, when I tell a sad story, my eyes are full of tears; and when I tell a story that's frightening or awful, my hair stands on end with fear and my heart jumps ... I look down [at my audience] every time from up on the rostrum, and they're crying and looking terrified, and as the stores are told they are filled with amazement.

(*Ion* 535c5–9, e1–3)

23 Konstan (2013) reasonably claims that

Aristotle's criticism of *opsis* in tragedy was not a general condemnation of visual effects, but was rather aimed at a tendency to exploit the shock potential of monstrous displays...that had nothing to do with the pity and fear that were properly aroused by the trajectory of the story or *muthos* as a whole.

(74)

But the performative elements he adduces – for example, the use of supernumeraries in *Oedipus Rex* or statuary in *Hippolytus* – are nonetheless (1) capable of appreciation from a reading of the plays (as Konstan's own appeal to textual details shows) and (2) ultimately augmentation rather than an essential element of the play's plot.

24 For the term *aristē politeia*, see *Pol.* 4.1.1288a22, 25, 7.1.1323a14, 7.4.1325b37, 7.13.1332a4; for that of the city in accord with one's prayers or highest hopes, see *Pol.* 4.1.1288b24, 4.4.1325b37, 7.10.1330a26–7, 7.11.1330a37. Identifying Aristotle's "best regime" is complicated because he uses the term to describe several different constitutions. I will only be concerned with the regime discussed in *Politics* 7–8.

25 Aristotle concedes that many of these material requirements are "why we pray (*euchometha*) that our city-state will be ideally equipped (*kat' euchēn*) with the goods that luck controls (for we assume that luck does control them)" (*Pol.* 7.13.1332a29–31).

26 *Pol.* 8.1.1337a10–15. Aristotle has previously expressed that point in his consideration of civil unrest (*Pol.* 5.9.1310a12–22) and in his criticisms of Plato's Socrates – whom Aristotle thinks neglected education in his proposals in the *Republic* (*Pol.* 2.5.1263b35). That education should be tailored to the regime in which it takes place is part of Aristotle's more general point that the *politeia* is what determines a city and thus, for instance, that not only education but even the determination of laws within a polis need to fit that city's *politeia*. See further *Pol.* 4.1.1289a12–15, 3.11.1282b10–12.

27 See Curren (2000, 100–9, 126–56) for detailed philosophical reconstructions of Aristotle's arguments in support of what I call the "safeguard" and the "communal" principles.

28 Several discussants of my paper have noted that one of the most enticing omissions from Aristotle's discussion of music in *Politics* 7–8 is what he thought of dithyramb contests as part of civic education and art. For discussion of the contests (without reference to Aristotle) (see Wilson 2003 and Kowalzig and Wilson 2013).

29 Shortly after the passage I cite Aristotle notes that later it will be necessary to determine "whether the attendance of the young at such performance should or should not be prohibited, and if so, how it should be handled" (*Pol.* 7.17.1336b25–7). The promise is unfulfilled in the surviving text of the *Politics*.

30 For more on the topic of the effect of performances of comedy on young people, see the essays of Bouchard and Munteanu in this volume.

- 31 *Politics* 8.7.1342a15–28 even includes prescriptions about “boorish” (*phortikos*) audiences which will apparently have their own appropriate musical performances in the city – although clearly they excluded the free and educated (1342a19).
- 32 Destrée (2018) provides detailed analysis of this claim.
- 33 At *Pol.* 8.3.1338a25–30 Aristotle quotes *Odyssey* 17.382–5 and 9.7–8 with the lines “call the bard alone to the rich banquet” and “the banqueters seated in due order throughout the hall, give ear to the bard.” Aristotle includes a line from *Od* 18 that is absent from our editions of the *Odyssey*.
- 34 Aristotle seems to use vulgar and illiberal interchangeably in *Politics* 7–8; he places them alongside what is “boorish” (*phortikos*) but also what is fitting for slaves (*andrapodon*). Aristotle sticks to the term boorish to describe the predicament of performance in the *Poetics*. For discussion of liberal and illiberal education (see Nightingale 2001).
- 35 See further Stalley (2009, 566–76), Nightingale (1996, 29–58) and Frede (2005, 167–84).
- 36 For references to “economic” vulgarity in *Pol.* 8, see 1337b12–14; see also 3.5.1278a6–11, a21–5.
- 37 See Aristotle’s critiques of Spartan education at 7.14.1333b5–16, 7.15.1334a40–34b5, and 8.4.1338b12–20. I explore this critique at length in Lockwood (2018).
- 38 8.5.1339b10–15. The *aporiai* of *Politics* 8 are complicated and overlapping. 8.2.1337a35–b3 lays out four preliminary disagreements about the *erga* of music and then 8.3.1337b28–32 identifies as a problem whether music is pursued solely for the sake of pleasure. 8.5 begins by invoking the previous *aporiai* (1339a11–14) and then claims to develop them “like a prelude” (*hosper endosimon* [1339a13; see Lord 1982, 68–70 for the musical allusion). 8.5 then delimits the questions to two: what is the power of music and why (or whether) one should share (*metexin*) in music, viz. learn it through instrumental music (1339a14–16). I take it that the second question, whether the young should share in music through learning instrumental music, is dealt with dialectically in 8.5.1339a26–1339b10, and then resolved in 8.6–7 (see, for instance, 1340b20–3). The first question, what is the *dynamis* of music, is taken up and resolved in the remainder of 8.5.1339b11–40b19. Although it goes beyond my paper to show this, presumable the second *aporia* is resolved in part through the solution of the first *aporia*. I am grateful to Malcolm Heath for sharing with me his unpublished work on the textual organization of problems in *Politics* 8.
- 39 8.5.1340a12–14. On the claim that music is mimetic for Aristotle (see Sörbom 1994, 37–46).
- 40 In the sequel, Aristotle notes that “When we listen to imitations our souls are changed” (1340a22–23). The mechanism of such a change of character goes beyond my paper, but is the subject of several papers. See further Woerther (2008, 89–103), Drefcinski (2011, 287–96) and Brüllmann (2013, 345–73).
- 41 Aristotle’s discussion in *Pol.* 7–8 incorporates concisely the same soul and virtue division as the *Ethics*. See 7.14.1333a16–29, 7.15.1334b12–27. Cf. *EN* 1.13, 6.1–2.
- 42 See *EN* 10.9.1179b29–31.
- 43 Determining the place of contemplation (*theōria*) in the account of education and leisure in *Politics* 7–8 has animated much scholarship on the text even though the issue seems almost entirely absent from Aristotle’s discussion (see, for instance, Solmsen 1964, Lord 1982, Depew 1991, and Nightingale 2001).
- 44 Jones (2012) argues that Aristotle distinguishes between two sorts of musical pleasure, the moral pleasure accessible to those who have learned to perform and adequately appreciate music, and a natural pleasure felt by all listeners regardless of performance experience (159, 172–4). If she is right, then the fact that

- Spartan education excludes musical performance may help explain why Aristotle is so critical of their ethical abilities in *Politics* II.9. See further Lockwood (2018).
- 45 Reeve (1998, 51–65) sees proper judgment as a central goal of Aristotelian education.
- 46 Aristotle has a special bone to pick about the unsuitable nature of learning to play the *aulos* – ranging from observations about its use in the aftermath of the Persian Wars to the mythological story that Athena rejected the *aulos*. See further Wilson (1999, 58–95).
- 47 On the problems and fragmentary nature of *Politics* 8.7 (see further Anderson 1966, 111–46; Lord 1982, 146–50; Ford 2004, 325–31).
- 48 It goes beyond the scope of my paper to discuss the point, but in *Politics* 3.11 Aristotle claims that the general public (*hoi polloi* [3.11.1281b9]) are better judges of *ta tēs mousikēs erga kai ta tōn poiētōn* because of the nature of communal or collective judgment. Something like that seems to be what grounds the claim of communal education in *Politics* 8.1.
- 49 Thus, I am in agreement with Ford (2015a) that Aristotle’s main goal for the *Poetics* is literary rather than theatrical criticism (a form of leisurely activity with its own historical pedigree, as Ford shows [7–12]). Both Heath and Munteanu, in discussion of my paper, have taken me to task for the use of the “excision” metaphor. They suggest that although Aristotle is critical of the misuse of spectacle, he ultimately envisions the ideal tragedy as one which is performed rather than read. For instance, Munteanu (2012, 76–90) has argued that the dramatist should put the play before his mind’s eyes (*Poet.* 17), as if it were performed (which Carcinus failed to do), and this process includes elements of staging and visual effects. This does not contradict my point that performance of tragedy remains unimportant for Aristotle.
- 50 See *EN* 1.13.1102b25–33. For discussion of the trope of “auditing” (see Grönroos 2007, 251–72).
- 51 I want to thank Dana Munteanu and Malcolm Heath for organizing and inviting me to a superb conference on the *Poetics*. I would also like to thank Rebecca Kennedy, José Gonzalez, Sam Flores, and Malcolm Heath for especially challenging questions about my paper at the conference. I am also grateful for skeptical written comments from Dana, Malcolm, Pierre Destrée, and Peter Simpson.