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Aristotle on *to kalon* and the experience of art[1]

Hallvard J. Fossheim

1. Introduction

In the *Republic*, Plato seems to advocate the banning of most extant poetry, because of its corrupting effect on the soul. Aristotle in his *Poetics* does not have any such qualms. Why the difference? I shall suggest that there are identifiable reasons for their divergent views. Central among them is that, while Plato asks whether the object of mimesis is *kalon*, Aristotle focuses his attention on whether the production of mimesis is *kalon*. This allows Aristotle to present his views not directly in opposition to Plato's, but as a reinterpretation of the question. Aristotle's reframing is intimately tied up with his presenting *kalon* as accessible to us in a more intellectual way than what is allowed for in Plato's *Republic*, or, indeed, in other works by Aristotle himself.

2. Two central terms: *kalon* and *thumos*

So, first of all, what does it mean to say that something is *kalon*? Among its more specific senses in the tradition down to and including Aristotle, are 'beautiful' and 'functionally excellent'. Accordingly, in the *Gorgias*, for example, "those persons who exhibit a disorderly soul cannot perform their function or, therefore, achieve the *kalon*".[2] Aristotle, furthermore, fleshes out *to kalon* in terms of the characteristics order (*taxis*), symmetry (*summetria*), and definiteness (*hôrismenon*).[3] These three are criteria of beauty, and they are criteria of functionality as well.[4] Having a right view of *to kalon* affords one what we might call a

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[2] Kelly Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of *To Kalon*", *Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1993), 355-71, reprinted in Lloyd P. Gerson (ed.), *Aristotle: Critical Assessments* Vol. 4, London: Routledge, 337-355 (at 339). The citation is from *Gorgias* 503a-504a.

[3] At *Metaphysics* M.3 (1078a36-1078b1). Cf. *EE* 1218a21-24; *PA* 645a23-25; *Pol*. 1326a29-35; *Poet*. 1450b34-37. For further references and a full discussion, cf. Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of *To Kalon*".

[4] Building on Gabriel Richardson Lear, we can sum up the three by saying that order is the teleological structure of the whole, symmetry concerns the properties of the parts taken singly, and definiteness is about the bounds

broadly aesthetic access to what reason, or the reasonable person, also sees as teleologically good. Reason has its reasons, while something's being *kalon* allows us to *see* what is *fitting*.

It should straightaway be noted that 'beautiful' and 'aesthetic' do not mean 'pretty' in this context. Paradigms of what is *kalon* are impressive victories in battle, people displaying grandness and nobility, and the well-ordered, awesome canopy of the night sky. What is *kalon* is worthy, admirable, grand, praiseworthy, besides carrying with it the notion of harmony and order. There is often honour in what is *kalon*. Correspondingly, a primary opposite of *kalon* is not simply 'ugly', but *aischron*—what is shameful, disgusting, or degrading, usually with the connotations improper, indecorous, unmannerly. So *kalon* in Plato and Aristotle is often better translated as 'fine', 'admirable', or 'noble' than as 'beautiful'.

I shall build part of the argument in this chapter on both philosophers' claim that *kalon* stands in a special relationship to the psychological dimension which they call *thumos*. To also provide something like a characteristic of *thumos* (often rendered into English as 'spirit'), it should be noted first of all that both Plato and Aristotle seem to treat this as a psychological part or faculty in a tripartition which also includes intellect and the appetites. The *logistikon*, the intellective faculty, is reason as a regard for the whole as well as the parts, and with a view to the ultimate good. In a harmonious and well-developed individual, intellect rules the other two parts. The difference between those two parts—appetite and *thumos*—can be spelled out as follows. While appetites relate directly to objects in the world that the subject desires, *thumos* is at heart always about the subject. If it is appetite that motivates me to take the last piece of the cake, I take it because I want the cake. If it is *thumos* which motivates me, I take the piece of cake because I feel I deserve it more than you do, or because I feel it is a nice way of getting back at you for having slighted me earlier.

So while appetite is simply desire for an external object, *thumos* or spirit is desire that involves the agent. If we glance to the *Phaedrus* for a readily available representation of *thumos*, the noble horse reacts not simply to the object of desire, but to the shamefulness of the desire of the appetitive horse. This is an exact parallel to Leontius, the famous necrophiliac in *Republic* book III: his *thumos* is raging at his own appetites, represented by his

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and limits of the whole. Together, these three tell us that what is *kalon* is also something that seems purposive, in the sense of being fitting. Gabriel Richardson Lear, "Moral Virtue and To Kalon" (chapter 6, in *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Princeton University Press, 2004, 123-146), 126-130. A rare example of *kalôs* probably simply meaning "effective" or something similar in the *Poetics* is 24.1459b11-13.

eyes, and not at the corpses.[5] So *thumos* is not only a desire for some thing, but a desire to *be* someone.[6] It is an evaluation of someone as being worthy, or unworthy, of admiration and emulation.

A central claim in the next section will be that *thumos* as a specific module or capacity of the soul, as this is depicted in the *Republic*, is supposed to be trained to respond to what is *kalon*. In this respect, the cake example also brings out a further aspect of *thumos*. *Thumos* works motivationally in the way it does because it is essentially competitive. Both Plato and Aristotle take victory and honour to be primary objects of *thumos*. What we take to be *kalon*, we experience as a special sort of pleasure. This pleasure is not like that of the mere appetites that define the lowest part of the soul. The pleasures of *thumos* are the pleasures of transcending the commonplace, of living up to some ideal, of being, or being witness to, greatness. It is all about admiration: wanting to be looked up to, praised, and recognized for one's own fine acts, and looking up to and wishing to emulate someone else or some act of theirs. So thumetic esteem is always, at the same time, an expression of self-esteem. Suitably, the well-ordered soul according to the *Republic* is characterized by *harmonia* and *sumphonia*, and is as such itself *kalê* (*Rep*. 430a; cf. 443c-444a).

3. Art, *kalon*, and *thumos* in Plato and Aristotle

In this section, I shall try to set out the relations between art, *thumos*, and to *kalon* in our two authors. A central claim in what follows will be that Plato in the *Republic*, no less than Aristotle, sees the issue of what is *kalon* as central to the shaping of *thumos*; and vice versa, that *thumos* is the main faculty to be affected by *to kalon* in a successful upbringing according to the *Republic's* pedagogical theory. The present chapter's main argument concerning the *Poetics*, namely, that Aristotle strikingly utilizes the term *kalon* primarily not for the objects of artistic representation, but for the craftsmanship behind the production of such representations, is logically independent of this contention. But only purely logically: the two are still substantially related, in that they provide us with a vantage point from which to see

[5] "Look for yourselves, you evil wretches, take your fill of the beautiful sight!" (440a) All translations from the *Republic* are by G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve, as available in John M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1997.

[6] Aristophanes' comic story of twosomeness in the *Symposium* takes on extra significance if we see it in the light of *thumos*' desire to be and/or relate to beauty. *Thumos* and *to kalon* are a main focus of Plato's theory of love (*erôs*).

the most dramatic development in the Platonico-Aristotelian corpus as a whole as not a shift towards a *thumos*/*kalon* correspondence in Aristotle (as a development marking a contrast with Plato), but as a shift from a *thumos*/*kalon* correspondence shared by both Plato and Aristotle generally to an intellectualized notion of to *kalon* in Aristotle's dealings with the arts in the *Poetics*.[7]

In the case of Aristotle, there is little reason to doubt the broad link between *kalon* and *thumos*. According to John M. Cooper's explicating translation of a passage from the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

> there are three objects of choice [*ta eis tas haireseis*] and three of avoidance: the *kalon* (the noble, fine, beautiful), the advantageous, and the pleasant, and their opposites, the *aischron* [the base, shameful, ugly], the harmful, and the painful. In relation to all these the good person gets things right, while the bad person gets things wrong, but especially in relation to pleasure.[8]

In very general terms, the three objects of choice named in this passage form part of a grand view of human motivation, human goods, and human development. In the wording of Myles Burnyeat, there "are three things to get right [...]. Pursuit of pleasure is an inborn part of our animal nature; concern for the noble depends on a good upbringing; while the good, here specified as the advantageous, is the object of mature reflection."[9] Cooper, in reference to the Burnyeat paper, clarifies his agreement as follows. "I am in agreement with Burnyeat in seeing that *Nic. Eth.* 1104b30-36, refers to three 'irreducibly distinct categories of value' that 'connect each with a distinct set of desires and feelings'."[10] Aristotle is discussing what we

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[7] As the two are still logically independent, however, the reader who is only interested in Aristotle's *kalon* usage can skip this section without loss as far as that narrower argument is concerned.

[8] *EN* II, iii, 1104b30-34, as translated in Cooper, "Reason, Moral Virtue, and Moral Value", 265.

[9] Myles Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good", 86; the main portion of passage Burnyeat is referring to is the one we have just quoted in Cooper's translation, *EN* II, iii, 1104b30-34. I speculate further on some of these implications in "Mimesis in Aristotle's Ethics", 73-86 in Andersen & Haarberg (edd.), *Making Sense of Aristotle: Essays in Poetics* (Duckworth, London 2001).

[10] Cooper, "Reason, Moral Virtue, and Moral Value", 278, n. 38, with quotes from Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good", 86. Cooper then goes on to mention two points of difference between his own interpretation and that of Burnyeat. "If my account differs from his, it is first of all, in the special emphasis I place on the spirited desires as becoming focused, through habituation, on the noble or fine in action, and on the subsequent pleasure that is taken in their satisfaction through that kind of action. Secondly, I emphasise, as Burnyeat does not, the permanence of the psychological independence from reason of both types of non-rational desires." (*Ib*.)

might call different sources of motivation for an agent.[11] To begin with, humans come into existence equipped with an ability to respond to their surroundings in terms of pleasure and pain (*hêdonê kai lupê*). Ethical development then implies acquiring a notion of the noble or fine (*to kalon*). Finally, the perfection of the agent's goodness means that he or she comes to possess a conception of the good (*to agathon*), sometimes interchangeably rendered by Aristotle as the advantageous (*to sumpheron*).[12]

To bring out that Aristotle thinks art broadly construed is crucial for forming us, we need only glance at the last two books of his *Politics*. An example of what can have a detrimental effect on children, is the stories they hear, as all such exposition prepares the way for their later pursuits. And the main dimension of the ethical shaping concerns steering the children away from what is shameful. According to Aristotle, "[t]he legislator should altogether outlaw shameful talk from the city state, as he would any other shameful thing, since by speaking lightly of a shameful activity one comes closer to doing it. He should particularly outlaw it among children, so that they neither say nor hear anything of the sort."[13] And—still unambiguously with the children in mind—since shameful talk is outlawed, "it is evident that we should also outlaw looking at unseemly pictures or stories" (*ib*., b13f). In the same vein is his advice to minimise contact with slaves in order to avoid the "taint of servility" (*ib*., b2f).

In proffering his message as to what the child should be allowed to see and hear as preparation, Aristotle in all likelihood does not primarily think of stories about weaving for weavers, or about pottery for potters, and not only because the children he is theoretically

[11] Likewise, *eudaimonia*, the zenith of human realisation, unites in itself all three; it "is best, finest, and most pleasant, and these three features are not distinguished in the way suggested by the Delian inscription" (*EN* I, viii, 1099a24f). According to the Delian inscription, the basis of which is contested by Aristotle, "What is most just is finest; being healthy is most beneficial; but it is most pleasant to win our heart's desire" (*ib*., 27f; translations from the *EN* are by Terence Irwin, unless otherwise specified).

[12] Cf. Cooper: "'The advantageous' [*to sumpheron*], in short, is a stand-in here for 'the good' (*to agathon*)" (*ib*, 265f). In a note, Cooper goes on to comment that the equation in this context probably has its roots in the fact that an action chosen as good is generally so chosen with a view to a greater whole or context than just the single act seen in isolation (*ib*., n. 22). In general, I would like to add, the good may be interpreted not so much as an extra item to aim at, as a new way of aiming at *to kalon*; what is new is primarily that the noble is now also seen via a view of the whole into which it fits.

[13] *Politics* VII, xvii, 1336b3-8; C.D.C. Reeve's translation. The statement about the effects of stories children hear is at 1336a30-34. (Cf. Plato's *Republic* III, 401b-d, where the impact of symbols, traces, or likenesses of what is bad is presented as dangerous to the young people who are exposed to them, but unable to judge about them.)

providing for are not artisans but Greek freemen; rather, the settings must only be close enough for the child imaginatively to start creating a vision of the great or noble (that is, ultimately, the good) man. Similarly, children must be taught drawing not because it is useful in any narrow way, "but rather because it makes them contemplate the beauty of bodies" (*to peri ta sômata kallous*, *Pol*. VIII.1338b1-2). This also means that certain parts of Homer, for instance, might be excellent for inspiring courage and justice, although their purely instructive value is limited—the weapons are different in Aristotle's time, and war only an extreme expression of civic virtue. The need for protection from the wrong impressions stems primarily from the fact that the bad or lowly make their mark on one before one realises what they are, or what they are signs of, or what they lead to or go along with. As much as providing the right models, or the right advice, or the right associations, steering in habituation will be a limiting of what is available. This is part of the basis for Aristotle's claim, also in *Politics* VIII, that

> everyone who listens to representations [*tôn mimêseôn*] comes to have similar emotions, even apart from the rhythms and melodies of those representations. And since it so happens that music is one of the pleasures, and virtue has to do with enjoying, loving, and hating in the right way, obviously one must learn and become accustomed to nothing so much as correctly judging and enjoying decent characters and noble actions. In rhythms and melodies there is the greatest likeness to the true natures of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance, all of their opposites, and the other characters. (*Politics* VIII.1340a12-21)

There is no doubt in Aristotle either that a sensitivisation to what is *kalon* happens through an activation and shaping of our thumetic qualities, or that art is paramount in this process.

But we need to contextualize this insight in order to see how what Aristotle then does in the *Poetics* might relate to his main interlocutor, Plato. And the claim that *thumos*[14] relates to the dimension of the *kalon* and the *aischron* in the case of Plato is not universally accepted among scholars.[15] I will try to indicate the correctness of this claim by pointing out how the

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[14] The part is often in Plato called *thumoeidês*.

[15] John Cooper has argued that Aristotle invents in saying *thumos* aims at *to kalon*, while Gabriel Richardson Lear suggests that this is clear in Plato as well: cf. Gabriel Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), esp. Chapter 6, "Moral Virtue and *to kalon*" (123-146), note 36 at 139; John M. Cooper, "Reason, Moral Virtue, and Moral Value", 253-280 in Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*,

education in music and poetry in the ideal city is designed to make the guardians' *thumos* able to recognize and value *to kalon*.

According to the social design of the *Republic*, the guardians are to be trained with poetry and music, including stories, even before physical training (II.376de). As Socrates says, this is the most important part of the training, since here, a pattern is established in their souls.[16] Especially while people are young, the soul is extremely malleable. The degree to which one can shape young souls is, for better or worse, extreme, so that "they will shape their children's souls with stories much more than they shape their bodies by handling them" (377c). For this reason, the stories to which the young are exposed must be *kaloi*. This is the one and only criterion for which stories should be told: "We'll select their stories whenever they are fine or beautiful and reject them when they aren't" (*ib*.). So here, we already have an indication that early cultural input is seen as contributing to attuning the young vis-à-vis what is *kalon*.[17]

The requirement of the stories' being *kaloi* applies even to such a degree that what is correctly described as truths and falsehoods about the gods is to a certain extent cashed out in terms of what is *kalon* and what is not. The very notion of truth seems at times to be considered primarily in terms of impact with regard to the *kalon*. It is in this sense that "telling the greatest falsehood about the most important things doesn't make a fine story [*ho eipôn kalôs*]" (377e). According to a related passage, "even if it [the story in question] were true, it should be passed over in silence" (378a) and not told to the young. What is at issue is not primarily literal truth as we moderns tend to think of it, but developing an optimal use of stories and of history (repeated at 383d), with *kalon* as the ruling criterion.[18]

A striking use of the "*kalon* over truth"-methodology, if we can call it that, is "the noble lie" (414b ff.), which robs the citizens of any insight into their actual identities. Correspondingly, all stories that portray the gods—objects of fascination and admiration—as "warring, plotting,

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Princeton: Princeton University Press (1999), at 263. Cooper argues that *thumos* according to the *Republic* aims only at *timê*.

[16] The Greek term translated as 'pattern' is *tupos*. In most of Socrates' analysis, the word occurs in the plural.

[17] While the final tripartition happens in book IV, the material we are presently considering is in books II and III. We should presume, however, that its author took seriously the tripartition to come, and tailored the pedagogical treatment in the earlier books to it.

[18] Cf. III.389b, where falsehood is termed useful as a sort of drug. An explicit instance of the application of the methodology is found at III.408bc. –In the background here is of course the presupposition that (real) reality is beautiful.

or warring against one another" (378bc) are banned for the reason that such acts should be seen by the citizens as shameful (*aischiston*, 378bc). Similarly, gods cannot be represented as changing, not least because this would mean changing themselves not into "something better and more beautiful [*kallion*]", but something "worse and uglier [or more shameful—*aischion*]" (381b). The weight throughout these passages is unambiguously on the *kalon*, more than on the *agathon*, as the object of representation and appreciation. The auxiliaries' education is not least supposed to make them *love to kalon* (403c). This happens to a great extent through poetry and music, that is, art (401d-402a).

As already mentioned, policy choices relating to the arts in books II and III are characterized in terms of their effects on psychological patterns, *tupoi*. The very fact that the means for shaping the young are patterns, and not arguments, is significant, because it tells us that the soul shaping does not relate directly to *to logistikon*, whose characteristic is its ability to calculate with a view to the good as a whole. As already indicated, the various choices concerning material culture, stories, and practices throughout these books are set out in terms of what is *kalon* (episodes depicting courage and moderation) and what is *aischron* (episodes depicting horror or lewdness or impiety or hubristic aggression).

Crucially, this non-intellectualist, self-regarding economy of shame and pride clearly points forward to the tripartition to follow in the text of the *Republic*. It is on this background we should consider as well the claim that the well turned-out man will be ashamed (*aischuneisthai*, III.396d) to imitate, in the narrow sense of enactment, anything that belongs to worse patterns. That the discussion after this (from 398c), moves on to consider modes and varieties of music only confirms the focus on *to kalon*—for instance, music imitates the tone of voice of someone moderate and courageous (399bc). More generally, the proper education in music and poetry is supposed to render the person graceful, *euschêmôn* (401de).

That this is a shaping of *thumos* rather than of reason in any more direct sense is also brought out by the fact that such coming to love what is noble paves the way for reason's later entry: "He'll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he's still young and unable to grasp the reason, but, having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself." (III.401e-402a) It is then explicitly stated in the text that this is the very reason for providing education in music and

poetry (*ib*.). That is to say, the education in music and poetry "ought to end in love of the fine and beautiful" (*dei de pou teleutan ta mousika eis ta tou kalou erotika*, 403c).

Considering the distinction between physical training and training of the soul makes the *kalon*-focus of the latter even more evident. The focus on what is *kalon* is almost exclusively seen as modifiable by music and poetry right to the end of book II (385c). Only in book III does courage, which has often been thought to be the only function of a well-turned-out *thumos* in Plato's *Republic*, come importantly into focus.[19] The relevance of *to kalon* to courage is, among other things, that physical training unaccompanied by music and poetry makes people more savage than they should be (410b-d). Someone with only physical training and no musical training will be full of spirit, but he will hate philosophy and music, and act like a savage with no grace (411de).[20] We can thus see one reason why the *thumos*/*kalon* relation is so important in the *Republic*. This is about what one aspires to be, and negatively about what one would be ashamed to be, depending on what sort of ideals are present in a culture.

4. The acknowledgement of ethical risk in shaping *thumos*

To take a more synoptic view, Plato and Aristotle also seem to agree on the following. Every burst of reaction from my *thumos* is available to me on the experiential level, as an integral part of what *thumos is*. This is always an emotive reaction *to* something, which is at the same time an expression of how I perceive myself and my own worth. But, on another level, every thymetic eruption is also a contribution to shaping and developing *thumos* itself. It is as if *thumos* is rehearsing a script, with me in a main role. As clearly indicated by the characterizations in terms of *tupoi*, the problem is that *thumos* does not have the capacity to

[19] And even here, appreciating *to kalon* relates to courage in that courage is the most extreme motivational job *to kalon* must do for the young guardians. Here, ugly *is* shameful, and beautiful is noble.

[20] The cultivating part is called 'philosophical' at 410de. The denomination 'philosophical' here means that the education in question provides cultivation more generally. (As said, at this point the text is still about the guardians, and the main psychological division has yet to be made.) –In the summary at III.410e-411b, the result of the educative process is a harmony between the two parts that render the individual both moderate and courageous. One might think this means that the parts in question are appetite and *thumos*, respectively. However, if harmony is not reached, the individual is cowardly and savage, *both* of which are thumoeidetic qualities. And at 411ab, it is the spirited part that is melted and dissolved by sweet, soft, and plaintive musical tunes from a flute. *Thumos* is conceived as directed towards what it supposes to be noble, harmonious, and just throughout the *Republic* (cf., e.g., IV.439e-440d), but spirit that lacks the required music-and-poetry education will not be directed towards the later realization of reason's rule (and the best among them will not be proper philosophers, VIII.549ab).

transform the innumerable episodes into anything like one *consistent* script. *Thumos*, in this sense, is *local*.

Only a proper upbringing can help us form the right sort of notions of what is fine and what is shameful. A successful upbringing is, perhaps more than anything else, an attunement and development of *thumos* to make us see what is fine and noble, and shun what is shameful and disgraceful.[21] This is the import of Plato's saying, echoed by Aristotle, that it is all-important to get into the right habits right from early youth. The right habituation is most of all about shaping our motivational settings, and giving us a desire for *to kalon*.

The *kalon* seems to fulfil a purpose or design. But in itself, it needn't actually be purposive; not least, the *kalon*-motivated agent needn't understand how it is purposive. The fine soldier in this *minimal* sense doesn't have to know in detail what the war is fought for, for example. The psychological economy of the perfect agent is such that reason and *thumos* are in alignment: only that which is judged by reason to be good is seen by *thumos* as being beautiful or fine. On the other hand, for people who are on the right track, but not yet fully developed as rational beings, a well-shaped *thumos* will generally let them react in the right way to situations and options by seeing them in this more 'aesthetic' manner.

In this connection, however, it is crucial to realize that we can be mistaken about *to kalon*.[22] Nothing guarantees a well-shaped *thumos*. The admired object of *thumos* is what the agent or person thinks or experiences as fine and beautiful. And one can be very wrong about what is in fact fine and beautiful. In such cases, *thumos* can for instance make one react to insults that are not really insults, or it makes one overreact or underreact in an unseemly manner. More dramatically, one can even be so ethically degenerate that one systematically sees as fine and great what is in fact disgusting or even horrendous.[23]

That we can be mistaken about *to kalon* here also means that we can be mis-shaped in a process where evil accumulates in the soul without our being aware of it.[24] That is to say: we

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[21] For evidence of the corresponding contention in Aristotle, cf. *EN* IV.9.1128b15-19.

[22] Cf., e.g., *Rep*. 378b-e. This is probably one reason why the *Republic*'s interlocutors agree that "everything fine is difficult" (*chalepa ta kala*, 435c).

[23] As an example, imagine groups of thugs who actually think they are wonderful and admirable in beating up innocent single individuals.

[24] The *Republic*'s guardians represent *thumos*, and are accordingly shaped by what I have called aesthetic means: art, imitations, images. If the images are fine and noble, the guardians are led unwittingly to the beauty of reason.

are designed in such a way that our ethical shaping through *thumos* happens by a piecemeal process. *And*, this is a process that we don't even know is going on. In sum, the practical process of hooking *thumos* up with *to kalon* implies serious ethical risk for the individual.

Given this broad agreement between the two thinkers, the question now becomes, what is happening in the *Poetics*? As we shall see, Aristotle in this work alters the framework for his discourse (the rules of engagement, one might say) in a way which minimizes ethical risk for the poetic sphere.

5. Aristotle's reframing of *kalon*

When we turn to the *Poetics*, we find a striking change of perspective on Aristotle's part. While Aristotle still, like Plato, evaluates extant art in terms of whether it is *kalon*, when it comes to the evaluation of art, *thumos* and what is *kalon* are no longer aligned. I will argue that, while the direct effect of art according to both Plato and the Aristotle of the *Politics* is primarily its effect on *thumos*, the effect is a more complex and intellectual one on Aristotle's account in the *Poetics*.[25]

I first want to emphasize that my claim concerning the *Poetics'* usage is not meant to deny the role of a reasonably well-shaped *thumos*, as part of one's character, as a prerequisite for experiencing and judging art works like tragedies according to that same work. In the *Poetics*, an emphasis on character is evident already from Aristotle's partial definition of tragedy in terms of it being about people "better than us". To Aristotle, there is no understanding of practical matters apart from character. Whether inside or outside drama, it is not possible to grasp a good character, or a bad character as bad, if one has not had a taste of *to kalon*.[26] This means that, in order to understand and judge the mimesis in question, you must have a *thumos* that is relatively well-shaped and virtuously integrated. Someone like *ho deinos*, the person who is good at calculating but lacks a view of the good, will not be able to get the proper pleasure out of a tragedy because he does not sufficiently recognize the object of the mimesis.

If they are "images of evil […], the guardians will "*little by little* […] *unwittingly* accumulate a large evil in their souls" (*Rep*. III, 401b-d). 'Unwittingly' translates *lanthane(i)*.

[25] One caveat is in order. I sometimes speak of tragedy, sometimes more generally about poetry or even more generally about art. Although the sources usually speak about a specific genre, my use of the wider denominations indicates that I take the texts to be intended to apply equally widely. Those who do not concur, can simply substitute the species for the genus in the relevant passages.

[26] Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* X, ix, 1179b19-20.

Aristotle reveals his view of character as central, not only to watching or reading, but to producing mimeseis, in his account of the origin of comedy and tragedy.

> Poetry branched into two, according to its creators' characters [*kata ta oikeia ethê*]: the more serious [*semnoteroi*] produced mimesis of noble [*kalas*] actions and the actions of noble people, while the more vulgar [*eutelesteroi*] depicted the actions of the base [*tôn phaulôn*], in the first place by composing invectives (just as the others produced hymns and encomia).[27]

It may look strange to us that Aristotle places the sort of weight he does on character in his *Poetics*, even defining the basic genres in terms of something that would seem to be external to the craft because it belongs to the object being depicted and not to the craft as such. But to Aristotle, character's being part of the object does not mean that it does not also form part of the demands on the artist. Tragedy, like comedy, is to Aristotle radically character-driven in that the author's character remains a source of the mimesis. This does not mean that the author has to be perfectly good, and it certainly does not mean that he has to have the sort of desires or plans that his characters do. But it does mean that he has to be acquainted with what is *kalon* in life: he must be someone who sees the world as a place for the admirable and the beautiful, for greatness and nobility. Only thus can he realize what it means when a given desire or plan aimed at its realization is thwarted, or what it means to such a person to find herself with a desire or plan which is evil or shameful. In fact, only then can he recognize that someone finds herself with such a desire or plan.

Strikingly, however, the passage quoted above is a rare bird in the *Poetics*.[28] In contradistinction to what he does in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Politics*, Aristotle generally does not in this work utilize *kalon* and its cognates to characterize the objects of mimesis. In the two places where he discusses the ethical qualities of the objects of mimesis, chapters 2 (1447b29-1448a5) and 13 (1452b30-1453a10), Aristotle uses a wide variety of terms known from the Ethics. An individual seen as object of mimesis is elevated (*spoudaios*), base (*phaulos*), superior (*chreissôn*), better (*beltiôn*) or inferior (*cheirôn*), and has vice (*kakia*) or virtue (*arête*) (all ch. 2). He can be decent (*epieikês*) or depraved

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[27] *Poet*. 4.1448b23-27; all translations from the *Poetics* are from Stephen Halliwell's Loeb translation.

[28] One instance of the comparative *kalliôs* is found at 15.1454b8-9, characterizing how good painters make people more beautiful. Likewise, the colours at 6.1450a39-b2 are perhaps described as *kallistoi* as such, although they have been applied by a painter.

(*mochthêros*), he can be very wicked (*sphodra ponêros*) or someone not preeminent in virtue or justice (*ho mête arête(i) diapherôn kai dikaiosunê(i)*) (all ch. 13). But the object of mimesis is generally not said to be *kalos*, or to instantiate *to kalon*.

However, this is not to say that Aristotle does not avail himself of *kalon*-terminology in the *Poetics*. Far from it, the text abounds in such talk. But remarkably, Aristotle reserves it for characterizing the artist's work: the crafting itself, and the artists' products qua products. The following three passages seem to me to provide clear instances of the former. Significantly, first among them is the initial declaration of the purpose of the *Poetics*, its opening words.

> We are to discuss both poetry in general and the capacity of each of its genres; the canons of plot construction needed for poetic excellence [*ei mellei kalôs echein hê poiêsis*] […] (*Poet*. 1.1447a6-9)

> Homer, in keeping with his general superiority, evidently grasped well, whether by art or by nature, this point too [*kai tout' eoiken kalôs idein, êtoi dia technên ê dia phusin*] (i.e., that a plot is not unified if built around an individual, but by structuring it around a unitary action) (*Poet*. 9.1451a22-24)

> […] the poet should be inventive as well as making good use of (*chrêsthai kalôs*) traditional stories. Let me explain more clearly what I mean by 'good use' (*kalôs*). (*Poet*. 14.1453b24-26)

What is *kalon* in all three instances is the act of making—the craft of composing—art. (It thus only makes sense that we encounter the adverb in place of the adjective.) It is not the model or object of mimesis which is *kalon*, but the artist's competence in composing a unity from the material. Distillation into a unified whole is here what is *kalôs* according to Aristotle.

The first instance quoted here, the *Poetics*' opening lines, tells us that the agenda for the work is to uncover what is required in order for the poet's constructive activity to be *kalon*. Being *kalon* is thus here unequivocally taken as a status or standard for poetic activity, not for what is portrayed or even for the product considered in isolation. Similarly, the quoted chapter 9 usage displays the adverbial form being applied to the poet over all poets, Homer, thus forging a link from the general activity to the particular poet. The normative weight of the term is perhaps even clearer in the chapter 14 instance, where Aristotle applies the adverbial form of kalon to specifics of how the poet should go about his business. Immediately

following the quote, Aristotle goes on to detail and evaluate the possible varieties in terms of the agent's knowing or not knowing what (s)he is doing as well as the action's being carried out or not—both central examples of choices in the poet's construction of plot structures.

The majority of *kalon* tokens in the *Poetics* can be seen to follow this paradigm. Most often, the term is used to commend poetic structures that are artfully structured or unified. The following are related passages with explicit use of *kalon*.

- 7.1451a9-11: it is stressed that magnitude is a requirement for being *kalliôn*. In further commenting on this stricture, Aristotle is careful to point out that the criterion cannot refer simply to water clocks (rules of competition) or a given audience's limited resources (powers of attention), but must first of all concern the nature of the matter, as this is intrinsic to the art.
- 11.1452a31-32: the *kallistê* recognition occurs simultaneously with reversal. This too is obviously a feature that concerns the structure—or structuring—of the events and thus the poet's product *qua* the poet's product, not a reference to, e.g., which real-life models might be most suitable.
- 13.1452b30-31: the structure (*sunthesis*) of the *kallistê* tragedy is complex. This refers back to the definition in chapter 10 of a complex plot as one with recognition and/or reversal.
- 13.1453a22-23: summary of specifics *kata tên technên* (character, change to adversity, cause in error, single plot) of which structure makes for the *kallistê* tragedy (cf. *ib*., 1453a19). As for all the *kalon* instances in this group, this concerns specific qualities or features of the product, but seen as a result of the process of composition, as was announced as his topic in the beginning of the work and remains the focus of Aristotle's interest.

A rare instance of *kalon* as merely what has an effect (the inclusion of loan words and similar ploys to create an out of the ordinary impression), seemingly without regard to any greater structure, is 22.1458b18-21. More typically, however, Aristotle has something to say about what makes the *kalê* structures and plots *kalê*, beyond the fact that they are unified. They are so structured for a purpose. And as we gather from chapter 7, that purpose has to do with understanding.

> A whole is that which has a beginning, middle, and end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow necessarily from something else, but after which a further event or process naturally occurs. And end, by contrast, is that which itself naturally occurs, whether necessarily or usually, after a preceding event, but need not be followed by anything else. A middle is that which both follows a preceding event and has further consequences. Well-constructed plots, therefore, should neither begin nor end at an arbitrary point, but should make use of the patterns stated. Besides, a beautiful [*kalon*] object, whether an animal or anything else with a structure of parts, should have not only its parts ordered but also an appropriate magnitude: beauty consists in magnitude and order, which is why there could not be a beautiful animal which was either minuscule (as contemplation of it, occurring in an almost imperceptible moment, has no distinctness) or gigantic (as contemplation of it has no cohesion, but those who contemplate it lose a sense of unity and wholeness), say an animal a thousand miles long. So just as with our bodies and with animals beauty requires magnitude, but magnitude that allows coherent perception, likewise plots require length, but length that can be coherently remembered. (*Poet.* 7.1450b25-1451a6)

No doubt, the requirement that a whole is something with nothing outside it from which it follows, or nothing to which it leads, with necessity or likeliness, is also a cognitive demand. Thus, that a *kalon* plot is one tailored to our understanding is also brought forth by Aristotle's claim at 9.1452a9-10 that plots which manage to make the events seem to stem from design (as when Mitys' statue killed his murderer) are more *kalon*. [29]

Aristotle takes the artist's activity and product to be *kalon* in being ideally suited to create a special form of cognitive experience in the spectator or reader. This is the experience of realizing *that* one is confronted with a unified structure of the appropriate kind. In tragedy, the ideal form the experience takes is when the unity of the plot dawns upon one, the moment when all the parts that have been set forth one by one are suddenly grasped *as* parts.[30]

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[29] That "beauty consists in magnitude and order" too reminds us that we should not think of the passage as dealing with *kalon* as "beautiful" in a sense cut off from what was established in our discussion above of *kalon* as 'noble'.

[30] A seemingly unique use is found in chapter 25. "When the question is whether someone has spoken or acted well [*peri de tou kalôs ê mê kalôs ei eirêtai tini ê pepraktai*], one should examine not only whether the actual deed or utterance is good or bad, but also the identity of the agent or speaker, to whom he acted or spoke, when,

It does not seem likely that the *Poetics'* striking usage of the term *kalon* and its cognates are a mere coincidence. We know that Aristotle treated the text of the *Republic* as an articulation of Plato's views, and we know that he agreed with Plato's general notion of *thumos* as the aspect of our moral psychological setup which can be trained to recognize and value *to kalon* as the bedrock for ethical development and motivation. Taking this into account, a not unlikely interpretation of his surprising, and surprisingly consistent, usage in the *Poetics* is that it constitutes a response, if not a reply, to what Aristotle takes to be Plato's worries. While Plato focuses primarily on the effects on the audience, Aristotle dedicates the main bulk of his treatment to the issue of the poetry being well-crafted, and ultimately to the crafting itself.

This means that firstly, Aristotle shifts the focus away from the audience; and secondly, while very much delving on both producer and product, the *Poetics* gives a priority to the poet's activity. For even though the product is the end and the production is a means to that end, the product's quality of being *kalon* constitutes an indication of the nature of the productive process more than anything else. Mastering a craft means being able to construct the appropriate product, and it is this very mastery or competence that yields the relevant quality. That is to say, what is primarily *kalon* about poetry is the successful making of it, while the product is derivatively *kalon* by being well made.

This is not something that can be proven, of course. But even without speculating about its author's intentions, we can conclude that Aristotle's usage in the *Poetics* contributes to a drastic reframing of the question of how to evaluate and judge art. The one big worry in the *Republic* had been that the things actually portrayed through mimesis lead to a destructive fragmentation of the soul. The single most dramatic innovation from the *Republic*—and *Politics*—to the *Poetics* is a shift in focus to the craft of portraying. And this shift allows Aristotle to argue that art offers not a source of fragmentation, but of unity.

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with what means, and for what end—namely, whether to occasion greater good, or avert greater evil." (25.1461a3-8) Here, as acknowledged at the start of the present section, we see how criteria well-known from the Ethics play an integral role in judging whether something is *kalon* in a tragedy. Presumably, the thought is that, in order to be able to judge whether something has been well said by a character in the tragedy, we need to consider the whole context of the utterance. And in considering this context, we apply a regard for the whole which is like the one we must apply in order to judge well, or act well, in a practical setting. This does nothing to undermine the claim that *kalon* is used to characterize the work of art as well composed in the sense of being successfully designed for grasping by a discerning audience.

6. Aristotle's reevaluation of the audience

It is a rather drastic measure on Aristotle's part to set up the poet's perspective as a new focal point, both generally when it comes to poetry, and specifically when it comes to judgments in terms of what is *kalon*. As a pendant to this drastic measure, Aristotle also changes the corresponding notion of the audience. The author perspective allows him to demand a certain form of competence on their part to match that of the author. Most important among these innovations is Aristotle's well-known claim that, in order to enjoy the pleasure proper to representational art, you have to be familiar with the relevant models. In order to recognize the product, you must have seen the original. And as far as the representation of ethical matters is concerned, to love them is to know them: the correct appreciation of characters better than us, and of what happens to them, requires decency on the part of the recipient. Without this experience and insight, you are simply not in a position to judge properly the qualities of the work of art, and will be stuck admiring it as just so many fragments of spectacle without reference. With it, on the other hand, you don't even need the trimmings afforded by staging.[31]

This is a far cry from the picture invoked by Plato in his *Symposion*. At the drinking party, which takes place the night after Agathon has won a victory for his tragedy at the festival, Socrates turns to him and cries:

> "Agathon! […] How forgetful do you think I am? I saw how brave and dignified you were when you walked right up to the theater platform along with the actors and looked straight out at that enormous audience. You were about to put your own writing on display, and you weren't the least bit panicked. After seeing that, how could I expect you to be flustered by us, when we are so few?" "Why Socrates", said Agathon, "you must think I have nothing but theater audiences on my mind! So you suppose I don't realize that, if you're intelligent, you find a few sensible men much more frightening than a senseless crowd?" (*Symposion* 194a-b)

[31] For Aristotle's exclusion of *opsis* ('spectacle', including staging) from being part of the poet's art or necessary to the fulfilment of poetry's function, cf. *Poet*. 6.1450b15-20; 14.1453b1-8; 26.1462a11-13.

This exchange constitutes a rather dramatic take on how the masses rule the day at the theatre. In this very elegant display of an elitist perspective, Socrates even pokes fun at Agathon for partaking in, and setting himself up to be judged in, such a populist setting.[32]

To very briefly recapitulate the two philosophers' paradigmatic art recipients, then, Plato's audience is a mass of people, some of them very young, corrupted (without even realizing it) on a psychological level below the threshold of rational or even conscious processing. In his properly ethical writings, Aristotle seems to share this vision. But when we turn to the *Poetics*, the paradigmatic recipient is the experienced and decent reader, grasping at the same time both the representation's link to its real-life model and its inherent qualities as a unified whole.

What could explain this difference in presumed audience? It is possible that its basis is a philosophical one, such as a difference in their psychological theories. Aristotle might have allowed for other cognitive abilities among cultivated and mature individuals than did Plato. But at least when it comes to the young and the many, Aristotle is as adamant as Plato's dramatis personae about the critical psychological impact of art, and we have no direct indication that the two thinkers should differ drastically in their evaluation of the relevant cognitive abilities of the well brought up.

Part of the explanation might also be historical. Although new tragedies continued to be churned out well into the 2nd century AD, the acknowledged greats belonged to the 5th century BC. And it may be that already in Aristotle's time, something about the reception of tragedy had changed. In Plato, it is always taken for granted that tragedy works through being staged at festivals. The *Republic*, the *Symposion*, and the *Laws* testify to tragedy as primarily encountered in its realization on stage. And as is clearly demonstrated by the exchange between Socrates and Agathon in the *Symposion*, quoted above, these occasions are seen as boisterous, popular, even vulgar events. At the same time, the passage indicates that even the elitist group in question normally depended on being present there as their source for knowing about the play's qualities. As Socrates says, "we were at the theater too, you know, part of the ordinary crowd" (194c).

[32] As readers of Plato, we know that his Socrates doesn't give a toss about the masses' opinions as they can be gauged from rallies. The only test worthy of the name is a test between individuals.

Aristotle, by contrast, stresses how one gets all the relevant material out of a tragedy by treating it as text—that is, by reading it. And his very definition, and discussion, demarcates what a tragedy is by distinguishing its essence from all the stuff that can be added on stage as part of the dramatization. To Aristotle, the important tragedies are in a way already documents from an age gone by. Perhaps they, in his eyes, are so to a greater extent than they are integral parts of cultural training and weaving of the social web.[33] This would at any rate help explain why Aristotle, while he is as adamant as Plato's dramatis personae about the critical psychological impact of art on the young, allows himself to professionalize and perhaps even 'aesthisize' the experience of tragedy in the *Poetics*.

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I submit that Aristotle managed to respond to Plato's challenge by drastically reframing the question of art experience. By means of that same reframing, he reminds us that it can be part of the artist's job to surprise, and to surprise in a particular way: through intellectual satisfaction, so that even elements that at first seemed jarring are tentatively integrated into one's experience. Aristotle thus produced an analysis which is still unsurpassed of how we in one complex epiphany can judge the artist, the work, and ethical goodness.

[33] This is not simply to say that Plato was closer in time to the historical events. It is also to say that, as is evidenced by most of Plato's dialogues, his work amounts to an incantation of a past world. It has often been stressed how Plato makes the bulk of his writings into a way of making Socrates present (whether his own or history's). No less striking, however, is the fact that much of his oeuvre is also a way of bringing back remnants of the lost world of Athens—people and kinds of people—as it was before the end of the Peloponnesian war. Tragedy was part of this world, and as such a part of this wider object of love, on one level, and hate, on another level, in the dialogues. To Aristotle, they have become an object of study.