

The Politics of Performance
Music's Political Utility in the Writing of Plato, Aristotle and Nietzsche

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While music is a consistently present and important part of most people's lives in some way or another, it seems its importance is often overlooked when we consider the composition and meaning of our existence.¹ Yet discussions of music can be found at the center of the major works of political philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, and Friedrich Nietzsche. In the writing of these three authors, music plays an important, even central, role in how we connect with the experiences of others and evaluate our own existence. As a result, I believe a discussion of this role is important to the larger social and political discourse. For each of these authors, music has the ability to alter, for better and worse, our relationship to the world around us and our interaction with others.

For all three authors, this debate centers on a discussion of Greek tragic drama. The power of Greek drama is difficult to segregate from its musical elements, particularly the chorus. Although tragic drama combines visual and poetic elements with the musical, the powerful influence of its content rests largely on the effects created by the music. For Plato, discussions of music's potential and the role of tragic drama take place most notably in the *Republic*. In their exploration of the ideal city, Socrates, and Plato's brothers, Adeimantus and Glaucon, discuss the value of tragic drama as well as the role of music in the education of the city's guardians. Music has the potential for edification, but because of its emotional power, its place is prescribed and monitored. Aristotle addresses the place of tragedy in the *Poetics*, arguing that tragic drama has the ability to educate us. The staging of tragedy offers the audience a vicarious personal

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experience. For Aristotle, tragedy creates an understanding of the experience of others, promotes unity, and leads to better politics. Political deliberation, for Aristotle, requires a plurality of perspectives and an appreciation for the experiences of others. In the *Politics*, this deliberation is compared to a musical performance in which multiple parts work together to produce a larger good, rather than the unitary approach to government presented in the *Republic*. For Nietzsche, too, music provides greater benefit than harm. Nietzsche's reference to works by Richard Wagner at the close of *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, including *Tristan und Isolde* and *Lohengrin*, as renaissance examples of tragic drama lends support to the idea of music as the crux of tragedy's power. "In return, music imparts to the tragic myth an intense and convincing metaphysical significance that word and image without this single help could never have attained." (Nietzsche 2000a, 126) By presenting human flaws as awe-inspiring, tragedy gives us the courage to live our lives irrespective of them. Nietzsche emphasizes our ability to accept human shortcomings once seeing them aggrandized through tragic drama, the foundation of which is music.

More broadly, the presentation of human flaws with a kind of awesome power empowers us to reject nihilism, a view of existence partially explored, or at least alluded to in the writing of two of the three authors. In Plato's *Republic*, the alternative to justice found in the ideal city that Socrates describes is a state of nihilism, embodied in tyranny, a life filled driven by selfish acquisition. The reality of this empty existence, tied so painfully to immediate and venal desires, is ultimately meaninglessness in Plato's view. Socrates fears such a state of humanity and refuses the idea that a life in which each man cares for and pursues only his own success and desires is best. Socrates is motivated to explore the intrinsic value of justice by the possibility

that he might prove a life of integrity to be better than the life of a tyrant. Nietzsche more outrightly defines his fear of nihilism and argues the strength to overcome such a view can be found in the experience of music and tragic drama.

The most basic form of political interaction is the co-existence of many individuals. Our ability to live with others in a community requires an interaction with our neighbors that is necessarily political. Successful co-existence depends on our ability to negotiate disagreements, set up successful systems of trade, and defend our common space from danger. After examining the writing of Nietzsche, Plato, and Aristotle, I find that Nietzsche, seemingly the least political of all three, offers the most politically promising explanation of human life. In this thesis, I will argue that Nietzsche's view of tragedy as a prevention of nihilism through its potential for self-forgetting is the most important political tool discussed by all three authors, and allows him to navigate the dialectic between philosophy and politics found in Plato and Aristotle. While Nietzsche is the least political, and perhaps the least generous to ideas of democracy, the individual lifestyle he describes and advocates for is unintentionally the one best suited to co-existence with others. Music, for which he is a champion, has the ability to help us recognize and experience a human oneness, provides inspiration to live with our own outstanding flaws when employed in tragic drama, and can lead to successful interaction with others. While Nietzsche does not and would not describe his understanding of music as a service to political ends, the value he assigns it is necessary for the political usefulness that both Plato and Aristotle find in music and tragedy, and is most useful for existence as a political being in society.

1. Nihilism

The purpose of Plato's *Republic* is the investigation of justice's intrinsic value. By proving that justice is valuable in itself, Socrates can demonstrate that a tyrannical, unjust life is not most desirable. Instead, a fulfilling life is one lived in service to something greater than momentary, selfish desires. This series of proofs gives human existence meaning. The work opens with Socrates's questioning of Cephalus, an old man, regarding his definition of justice. Cephalus defines justice as "speaking the truth and repaying what one has borrowed." As Socrates's inquiry continues, the definition is amended by Polemarchus, Cephalus's son, to giving both friends and enemies what they are owed, "that to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies is justice." Thrasymachus, a third party, becomes irritated with Socrates's questioning and offers an alternative and unsettling definition of justice. "This, then, is what I say justice is, the same in all cities, the advantage of the established rule. Since the established rule is surely stronger, anyone who reasons correctly will conclude that the just is the same everywhere, namely, the advantage of the stronger." Thrasymachus adds, "So, Socrates, injustice, if it is on a large enough scale, is stronger, freer, and more masterly than justice. And, as I said from the first, justice is what is advantageous to the stronger, while injustice is to one's own profit and advantage." The question of whether justice is something that can be valued in and of itself, without external benefits becomes the core of the discussion. Socrates, unwilling to be convinced by Thrasymachus's argument, sets out to show the intrinsic value of being just. Socrates believes justice is an intrinsic good and knowledge of this good creates the best life. He is persuaded to explore the value of justice because his ultimate desire is to prove knowledge leads to a better life than tyranny. The assumed preference for a tyrannical life, which is

portrayed by the story of the Ring of Gyges² in Book II of the *Republic*, troubles Socrates. He believes a void will remain if and when the tyrant's every desire has been fulfilled and all his immediate needs met because he will continue to lack anything of substance. Instead, he will live a life without meaning and purpose. The fear of nihilism expressed in the *Republic* is that if tyranny is the best life, one that ultimately produces no fulfillment and achieves no purpose, then human existence is meaningless. If the discovery of truth and consequent fulfillment is simply a matter of taking time to think considerately about our existence, Plato and Socrates believe there is a pressing incentive to help people do so. (Plato 1992, 9, 15, 20)

The means Socrates selects for the investigation of justice's intrinsic value in the *Republic* is the analogy of the soul to a city. Once he is able to identify a proper definition of justice on a large scale, he says he will be able to identify justice within the individual and determine whether it has intrinsic benefits. This claim produces some problems for political interaction, something that must happen between individuals. The kind of interaction that occurs between separate individuals is not easily reproduced within a single person. Despite the fact that Socrates uses the model of a political structure, the city, to conduct his investigation of justice's intrinsic value, the ways in which politics could contribute to our search for meaning and the prevention of nihilism take a back seat to the individual's means of attaining fulfillment. The city of the *Republic* as a metaphor for the soul allows Socrates to address concerns related to the individual and their sense of purpose and meaning, but interactions between members of the city cannot be considered. Productive interactions between individuals in a real city cannot be

² The ring of Gyges has the power to render its wearer invisible. Glaucon argues that any person in possession of the ring would act unjustly (killing, stealing, cheating) because his invisibility would give him the ability to do so without suffering any consequences. Glaucon uses this as proof that an unjust life is more desirable than a just one and our only reason for acting justly is out of fear of the consequences imposed by society. (Plato 1992, 36)

replicated in a psychologically sound way within the soul of a single person. Ultimately the only facet of the *Republic* that makes it a work of political philosophy is this metaphor, but it is this very metaphor that prevents the consideration of political interaction as a means of avoiding nihilism.

A nihilist view of existence can be found in other works of Plato, the *Apology* and the *Phaedo* among them. In the *Apology*, Socrates describes death as one of two things: either a kind of positive journey out of this life and into another where we are united with those who have passed, or it is nothing “and [we] have no awareness whatsoever of anything at all.” Becoming reunited with those who have passed allows for continued inquiry in pursuit of truth. At the close of the *Apology*, Socrates says, “But now it’s time to leave, I to die and you to live. Which of us goes to the better thing, however, is unclear to everyone except the god.” (Plato 2002a, 58, 61) We can assume that Socrates believes death might be preferable to life if it offers the potential of greater interrogation in pursuit of truth. The *Phaedo*, the Platonic dialogue in which friends visit Socrates in prison and help him prepare for his execution, also depicts Socrates as calm, even relieved at death’s approach. After being encouraged to prolong the execution as much as possible and spend his last moments taking advantage of final pleasures, Socrates says “And it’s reasonable too for me not to do them, since I think I’ll gain nothing by drinking the poison a little later.” Socrates’s attitude towards the end of his life, despite the pursuit of knowledge it has afforded him, is one of acceptance. At the end of the *Phaedo*, Socrates says to Crito, “we owe a cock to Asclepius. Please don’t forget to pay the debt.” Owing a debt to Asclepius, the God of Healing, begs the question, does Socrates see death as a cure to life? The *Apology* delineates death’s possible outcomes into nothingness or a

continuation of the Socratic pursuit of truth. The *Phaedo* too suggests that the continued pursuit of knowledge in the afterlife should negate a fear of death. These works express a view similar to the Christian idea of existence, in which mortal life is a transition or a trial before entry into eternal happiness is granted. Undoubtedly, the Socratic pursuit of truth influenced the Christian pursuit of a relationship with God. Both views align with a nihilist outlook by suggesting that mortal life is not meaningful in itself, but only as a means to an end after death. (Plato 2002b, 81, 83)

In the *Republic*, Socrates considers every element of the polis's daily life in his search for justice via the analogy of the city. Among these elements is Greek drama; comedy and tragedy. In the construction of his ideal city, Socrates describes tragic art as "something rather unreasonable, full of causes apparently without effects and effects apparently without causes; the whole moreover so motley and manifold that it could not but be repugnant to a sober mind, and a dangerous tinder for sensitive and susceptible souls." This description is very similar to Socrates's description of the tyrant's existence in Book IX of the *Republic*, "Then, the tyrannical soul--I'm talking about the whole soul--will also be least likely to do what it wants and, forcibly driven by the stings of a dronish gadfly, will be full of disorder and regret." The correlation between the emotional irrationality summoned by tragedy is likened to the absence of self control Socrates identifies in the tyrant. The author rejects the presence of tragedy in the city for the same reason that he rejects tyranny; the unfulfilling and unjust existence that is a product of uncontrollable and irrational emotion. He favors, instead, the just pursuit of truth that will give life meaning and purpose. (Plato 1992, 89, 248)

Socrates believes, or claims to believe, in an absolute truth. Only the search for this truth through the practice of philosophy gives life a satisfying purpose and, Plato believes, composes the only alternative to the life of the tyrant. Nietzsche does not believe in the existence of an absolute truth. Furthermore, he believes our search for such a truth will never give us fulfillment. He argues instead that we will discover the absence of truth once we have exhausted our search. In the meantime, believing this search will be fruitful will have destroyed our ability to deal with the realities of our existence. The promise of absolute truth or Christian redemption is similar to the feeling of hope. Once one has experienced the promise of hope, it is almost impossible to reorient oneself to an absence of that feeling. Having accepted the existence of the summum bonum, our ability to understand life as lacking a “correct” explanation or path will be difficult, if not impossible, to recover. Nietzsche’s view is not simply that we will be unpleasantly surprised when we discover that absolute truth does not exist, but along the way submission to the self-denial that is necessary for its pursuit will have had its own harmful effect. By denying ourselves for sake of something that does not exist, we have missed out on important facets of life and means of self-development.

In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes the Socratic search by saying,

“So as to abolish hidden, undetected, unwitnessed suffering from the world and honestly to deny it, one was in the past virtually compelled to invent gods and genii of all the heights and depths, in short something that roams even in secret, hidden places, sees even in the dark, and will not easily let an interesting painful spectacle pass unnoticed. For it was with the aid of such inventions that life then

knew how to work the trick which it has always known how to work, that of justifying itself, of justifying its 'evil'." (Nietzsche 1989, 68)

Nietzsche rejects not only the Socratic pursuit of truth, but the foundation of the Christian tradition and the framework of modern science. Nietzsche argues that Socrates's pursuit of justice and logic has been recreated in the form of the Christian pursuit of God, which explains our suffering, what Plato might describe as a disordering of our souls, as a temporary test of our faith. Pursuing a relationship with God replaces the Socratic pursuit of truth through knowledge. "We men of knowledge of today, we godless men and anti-metaphysicians, we too, still derive *our* flame from the fire ignited by a faith millennia old, the Christian faith, which was also Plato's, that God is truth, that truth is *divine*." (Nietzsche 1989, 152)

Nietzsche argues that modern science, too, is an extension of the Socratic pursuit and needs the ascetic ideal, a lifestyle in which we deny ourselves momentary pleasures in favor of a greater achievement in the future, to be perpetuated.

"This pair, science and the ascetic ideal, both rest on the same foundation--I have already indicated it: on the same overestimation of truth (more exactly: on the same belief that truth is inestimable and cannot be criticized). Therefore they are *necessarily* allies, so that they are to be fought they can only be fought and called in question together." (Nietzsche 1989, 153)

Nietzsche resists the practice of seeking a single meaningful end, believing it will eventually become obvious that such an end does not exist.

Nietzsche, instead, believes life's meaninglessness can be disguised and life can be perpetuated by the aestheticization of reality through beauty and illusion. This requires, however, a recognition of what we are aestheticizing; what human flaws and shortcomings we are disguising. If we saw the reality of our lives, we would be filled with despair and cease to desire existence. For Nietzsche, the arts have the potential to give us some reprieve from such despair. "Having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art--life." (Nietzsche 2000a, 59) The arts, among them tragic drama and music, give us the means to live our lives despite human imperfection. Nietzsche's objection to the ascetic lifestyle advocated by and developed from the Socratic pursuit of knowledge to the priest who denies himself in the name of God lies in the unwillingness of both to acknowledge the root of this suffering. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes the priest as pursuing a temporary and circuitous method of dealing with hopelessness. "He combats only the suffering itself, the discomfiture of the sufferer, *not* its cause, *not* the real sickness: this must be our fundamental objection to priestly medication." (Nietzsche 1989, 130) The priest assumes self-denial as a way of life. His reward for this discipline lies in the afterlife. In contrast, the ascetic ideal practiced by the philosopher or the author for the sake of improving their craft is something Nietzsche admires. Art, too, provides a means of dealing with existence that is illusionary. The difference is that the artist is aware of the illusion. The priest, or devout Christian, believes the daily comforts religion provides are in fact connected to a God, an

afterlife, and redemption. Nietzsche believes that the artist's awareness of the illusion makes him superior to the priest. By being aware of the illusion, the artist is more honest, more connected to the realities of existence, and therefore able to live a more fulfilling life. The artist's honesty allows him to attribute real value to the experiences of life, rather than masking them with the promise of elusive rewards.³

While the ideal city of the *Republic* is meant as an analogy to the soul, Plato also demonstrates through its construction that the life of tyranny is a bad one for politics. The tyrant's life is one in which he is a slave to momentary desires and seeks, but never finds, fulfillment in power and possessions correlates to a meaningless view of existence. For the tyrant, the satisfaction of desire becomes the meaning of life, but desire's inability to ever be permanently satisfied prevents the tyrant from finding fulfillment. Such individuals cannot coexist in a fruitful political environment. Their investment in their own wants and needs prevents them from acting to benefit the whole. Even in the ideal city, the guardians that rule are concerned for the well-being of the entire city, rather than their own individual or class benefit. The tyrant's inability to see a meaningful pursuit outside of himself makes it impossible for him

³ Allan Bloom (1987) provides support for the presence of nihilism in the Platonic dialogues and the contrast between Plato and Nietzsche's view of asceticism. As part of his evaluation of the American system of higher education, Bloom explores the incarnation of nihilism in America. His discussion of this phenomenon begins around value relativism, a concept which has become part of American discourse, or so he says. This relativism manifests in two ways; the first is to resist any denomination of good and evil. The idea of determining something different to be "good" or "bad" seems intolerant. The second manifestation is an increased admiration for those who nevertheless still cling intensely to their values. In both cases, Bloom argues that "Values are not discovered by reason, and it is fruitless to seek them, to find the truth or the good life." Bloom, too, sees the Socratic search for truth to be an attempt to avoid a sense that life is meaningless. He discusses Nietzsche's differing approach to the realities of the human condition. "The salutary illusion about the existence of good and evil has been definitively dispelled. For Nietzsche this was an unparalleled catastrophe; it meant the decomposition of culture and the loss of human aspiration." Bloom's identification of culture and aspiration as footholds for avoiding nihilism are a pinnacle of the view of nihilism I discuss in Nietzsche. "The Socratic 'examined' life was no longer possible or desirable. It was itself unexamined, and if there was any possibility of a human life in the future it must begin from the naive capacity to live an unexamined life." This statement correlates with the value Nietzsche puts on the intoxication and self-forgetting Dionysian experience of tragedy. Bloom's writing lends support to the idea that nihilism is a concern for both Nietzsche and Plato.

to set aside his dedication to his own momentary pleasures and devote himself to something greater. The absence of political interaction under tyrannical rule provides no benefits for combatting nihilism. Political interaction offers two means of preventing by nihilism, and tyranny's resistance to such interaction makes it particularly undesirable. The first way in which political interaction gives life meaning is its ability to combat feelings of isolation, which prevent the development of feelings of unity amongst fellow men. The nihilist view, which lacks a sense of purpose or direction, makes it difficult for individuals to feel connected with others by the common experiences life can offer. The second means by which political interaction can give life purpose is its ability to prevent apathy, which dissuades individuals from becoming part of a plurality that works together towards a common goal with others. Not only can nihilism lead one to feel isolated and consequently struggle to care for others, but it provides no motivation to work with others towards a greater, common goal. Nihilism is not only a threat to the individual's quality of life, but stands in the way of successful politics.

2. Tragedy

Nietzsche believes, among other things, that nihilism can be avoided through the seduction of tragic drama. Tragic drama and music are discussed in the *Republic* in two ways. The first is the role that music is allowed to play in the education of the city's guardians. The second is whether there exists a place for the presentation of tragic drama in the ideal city. These become two distinct questions. Music, when isolated, can be an educational tool for honing tastes and a political tool for inspiring certain emotions. Tragic drama, however, is ultimately banned from the city because of its ability to summon unreasonable reactions. Socrates's fear of

the misuse of music and the power of tragedy in the *Republic* continues to suggest a fear that human life might naturally lack a specific purpose. Life only attains meaning and purpose with the proper manipulation of music's influence. Otherwise, tragedy and its depiction of short-sightedness, hubris, and the unpleasant ends which accompany such actions, as well as its unreasonable emotional appeal to audiences, does not serve the pursuit of truth Socrates seeks.

The education and grooming of the guardians of the ideal city is discussed at length in Book III. While Socrates expands on the point in Book II that a good education given to the guardians of the ideal city must include music and poetry, both must be carefully monitored. Because the arts are representations of reality, they are removed from truth and therefore are in opposition to what is sought by philosophy. The discussion of proper education begins with an analysis of the stories children will be allowed to hear. All kinds of preventative measures are taken to ensure that children become the best citizens possible, including the selection of a certain style of delivery. This is due to the ability of stories to inspire imitation, particularly those told in an imitative style as opposed to pure narrative. (Plato 1992, 70) Only heroic stories that honor the gods and promote the best actions are allowed. Socrates accuses tragedy and comedy, "narrative through imitation," as distracting the guardians from their work as "craftsmen of the city's freedom" by promoting the imitation of things other than perfect leadership. The *Republic* does not credit children with the ability to have their own experiences and gather the appropriate take-aways. Tragedy continues to pose a threat to adults and ultimately all citizens are kept from observing it. In Socrates's view, the only reaction people are capable of having towards their experiences is emulation and to emulate the actions of tragic heroes would be very problematic for the operation of the city.

In addition to the threat of imitation that the dramatic arts poses, the *Republic* states that comedy makes a mockery of the stories, gods, and values, which the city has established. Comedic writers, like Aristophanes and his work the *Clouds*, make similar claims of mockery about philosophy. These claims are based on the idea that philosophers are looking to replace the traditional histories and gods with their own logical explanations, but Plato's Socrates believes that these gods and histories should not only be revered, but revised so as to seem always virtuous and correct. If stories in which the gods act foolishly are permitted, then "everyone will be ready to excuse himself when he's bad, if he is persuaded that similar things both are being done now and have been done in the past by *close descendants of the gods*." For the sake of the ideal city, the gods are to be beacons of good behavior. Service to them is not, as it is in the Christian tradition, the summum bonum, but their presence in human history should function as examples of virtue. Socrates seeks to eliminate all excuses for irrational, emotion-driven actions, and so those stories in which the gods too behave badly are edited or removed from the poetic repertoire. (Plato 1992, 68)

In a greater offense, tragedy presents stories with unsettling conclusions that result from the unwise actions of the main characters. Socrates believes the kind of poor choices that lead these characters to their tragic ends corrupt the viewer with the suggestion of such behavior, and that the power of their presentation will lead to inevitable imitation. The theater setting provides the spectator with the experience of both a sense of safety in the wake of the tragedy on-stage, as well as a sense of awe at the unfolding plot. These factors, when combined with the power of music are believed to lead the audience to imitate the actions they observe in these pieces. These

types of musical dramas are therefore banned from the ideal city. Neither tragedy, nor those capable of performing it, will be permitted to exist in the city.

“It seems, then, that if a man, who through clever training can become anything and imitate anything should arrive in our city, wanting to give a performance of his poems, we should bow down before him as someone holy, wonderful, and pleasing, but we should tell him that there is no one like him in our city and that it is unlawful for there to be. We should pour myrrh on his head, crown him with wreaths, and send him away to another city.” (Plato 1992, 74)

This is another extreme preventative measure. The fear that some might be moved to imitate the poor choices they see on the stage outweighs the possibility that citizens could gather a kind of wisdom from the vicarious experience of watching the tragedy that befalls those who make such poor choices, a position that will be advocated by Aristotle.

While tragedy necessitates the experience of an event in the presence of others, music warrants its own exploration as something encountered by the individual, and the *Republic* addresses it additionally and separately from tragedy. While the content of songs and odes will be required to conform to the guidelines already in place for stories, Socrates says that the rhythms and modes must also fit the carefully selected texts. (Plato 1992, 74) Socrates outlaws certain scale modes, including those which convey a lamenting attitude. The soft modes, which he identifies as being suitable for drinking parties and encouraging drunkenness, softness, and idleness, are said to be “relaxed” and should also be banned from the city. He asks to be left

simply with two modes; one for promoting courage and one for promoting self-control. Socrates requires the same thing of meter, eliminating all but that which inspires courageous actions and displays of moderation. Given these strict rules, I believe we can deduce that Plato believes people are not capable of feeling an emotion, especially when it is inspired through music, without acting on it, or being internally corrupted by it. A viewer might be led to harbor feelings of jealousy against his neighbor without ever acting them out. This life would still be one filled with the kind of unhappiness that the Socratic pursuit attempts to avoid through truth. Knowing the truth allows us not only to understand our own existence, but also the lives of others and explains any inconsistencies we might be offended by otherwise. In Book III, Socrates says, “fine words, harmony, grace, and rhythm follow simplicity of character”, in the sense of a “fine and good character that has developed in accordance with an intelligent plan” and that “gracelessness, bad rhythm, and disharmony are akin to bad words and bad character.” (Plato 1992, 77) This kind of classicism, he believes, will provide exposure to only the modes, words, and rhythms that are deemed courageous and respectable and will always produce lovers of the fine and beautiful. What music is capable of adding to the impact of tragedy is the ability to elicit emotions beyond logic. Socrates is portrayed as believing that the possibility for emotions to be elicited in reaction to the aural experience means music can produce a reaction so powerful that one would uncontrollably perform undesirable actions associated with these feelings.

The purpose of banning stories that promote undesirable action is obvious, in that imitation of these characters will lead individuals to act destructively in the city, although the claim that hearing these stories would lead to such actions remains questionable. Yet, the aversion to the musical element expressed in the *Republic*, especially its ability to elicit feelings

of sadness, idleness, or softness is not quite so clear. The modes that Socrates describes, he believes not only convey a narrative content of the lamenting or the “relaxed”, but, like stories with similar content, they inspire inappropriate actions or inaction. “Drunkenness, softness, and idleness are also most inappropriate for our guardians.” (Plato 1992, 75) On the other hand, Socrates believes music that promotes courage or moderation is to be valued, and can be used politically to summon particular responses from the city’s citizens. Socrates likens harmonizing the parts of the soul so that each performs its proper function to the limiting notes of a musical scale.

“He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale--high, low, and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious.”
(Plato 1992, 119)

It is not clearly laid out in the text that the author believes imitation is the only reaction possible to the experience of such stories of feelings, but his need to omit them from the education of the guardians, and from the polis more broadly, it seems to me, cannot be interpreted any other way. Imitation, a characteristic of all the arts including music and drama, is a vice in that it is one or more steps removed from the truth. According to Book X of the *Republic*, even artists are aware that they cannot create true representations. “I could make them appear, but I couldn’t make the things themselves as they truly are.” The tragedian is among these craftsmen. (Plato 1992, 266)

The issue of the intelligibility of art and music is also problematic for Plato. For him, intelligibility is a requisite for something to be beautiful and good. We cannot appreciate something's beauty if we are unable to understand it and it can be understood to be beautiful by understanding its construction. Tragedy's ability to elicit inexplicable emotional reaction makes its beauty unintelligible. According to Socrates in the *Apology*, even the tragic poets are unable to understand the power of their work.

“And so, in the case of the poets as well, I soon realized it wasn't wisdom that enabled them to compose their poems, but some sort of natural inspiration, of just the sort you find in prophets and soothsayers.” (Plato 2002a, 34)

In the *Republic*, Plato continues this thread with Socrates's statement, “Then imitation is far removed from the truth, for it touches only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image.” Not only is what is created in the arts determined to be a lesser version of what it represents, Socrates goes on to describe the creator as being necessarily unfamiliar with the truth of what he attempts to represent. “If he truly had knowledge of the things he imitates, he'd be much more serious about actions than about imitations of them.” The tragedian's inability to understand his craft makes its danger all the more pronounced. (Plato 1992, 268, 296)

In Chapter Four, “Arts of Experience, Politics of Expression,” of Brian Massumi's forthcoming book, *Semblance and Event*, the author suggests two impacts of music, delineated by a distinction between program music and absolute music. Program music is music written with specific reference or representation of a particular event, picture, or story. Absolute music,

written with no such extra-musical references, is considered “music for music’s sake.” Massumi argues that absolute music produces inescapable “affective/qualitative-relational order[s] of experience.” These relationships are built not on the “word-line” order through which we compile an impression from objective and concrete input, but rather on what we feel. While program music specifically and solely imitates to relay its extra-musical subject matter, absolute music draws on a non-specific element of the Sublime, in the Kantian sense of awe inspired by fear. Mahler’s compositions serve as the example of absolute music. (Massumi forthcoming, ms. 8)⁴

“His music would be intensely imagistic, but would make it an ‘imagery without reference’ (237)... The composition retains its properly musical force of expression, so powerfully enveloping the imagistic elements that the virtual visualization is converted into an immanent music-force without remainder. This becoming-immanent to the music of the imagery, according to Mahler, was so complete that it could take the place of actual vision.”⁵ (Massumi forthcoming, ms. 38)

Massumi is referring to a famous story in which, while walking in the mountains, Mahler tells a companion, “No need to look--I have already composed all that away.” (Ashby 2010, 222) The ability of a musical work to embody, even negate, the presence of a mountain range without

⁴ Brian Massumi’s book is currently in press. I am grateful to Dr. Ashby for providing me with this chapter in manuscript form, and page numbers correlate to the manuscript text.

⁵ The citations in Massumi’s text refer to Arved Ashby’s *Absolute Music, Mechanical Reproduction* (2010).

relying on programmatic or imitative musical gestures describes an effect of absolute music that is frighteningly powerful.

I believe the musical element of tragic drama, the chorus, is most likely to fall into the category of absolute music. Two points lead to this conclusion. The first is that program music is typically used to represent something extra-musical, such as a herd of sheep in Strauss's *Don Quixote*. The need for the music to represent these extra-musical elements is the result of an absence of visual cues, which are present in tragic drama. While visual drama also sometimes use programmatic music, it does not tend to be the foundation of the works, as is the case with the tragedy's chorus or modern opera. The second is the power with which the *Republic* describes the experience of tragedy, constructed largely around the music of the chorus. The power Massumi (I think correctly) ascribes to absolute music sounds much more like the unreasonable call to action Socrates fears in tragedy. However, the imitative characteristics music can possess (program music, for the purposes of this discussion) are identified and the musical element is then rejected for being removed from truth. While the strong inexplicable emotional responses elicited by absolute music seem like a greater threat to the hierarchy in which reason rules spirit and desire, the *Republic* more explicitly identifies the undesirable imitative nature characteristic of program music as a threat to knowing the truth. Absolute music and program music exist along a continuum, but I believe the threat Plato sees music posing, one that bypasses logic, is much more characteristic of pure absolute music. Absolute music's ability to affect our emotions without explicit extra-musical points of reference makes it more powerful and more difficult to describe, even identify. Plato's failure to explain his dismissal of certain

musics on these grounds demonstrates these characteristics of absolute music and its own way of eluding the explanation-driven Socratic pursuit of truth.

Massumi's writing also offers an explanation of the fear of tragedy and the misuse of music expressed in the *Republic*. "Language may be the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity, but the technique of ritual shows that it is eminently possible to activate and disseminate relation by predominately nonverbal means." (Massumi forthcoming, ms. 17)

Massumi's work suggests that music (absolute music in particular), like language, can allow us to draw connections between experiences that one has actually had and relatable experiences of others, which we have not experienced directly.

"It follows that any differential attuning of sensuous forms to each other is a way of performing virtual events, permuting or inventing nonsensuous similarities, and producing speculatively pragmatic truths, or semblances fore-tracing them.

Sensuous forms may also constitute an 'archive' of relational experience." (Massumi forthcoming, ms. 17)

The term sensuous forms I understand to correlate to felt experience, something we have experienced with our own senses. According to Massumi, a result of attributing outcomes of our direct experience to things that music or tragedy only allows us to believe we've experienced requires a faith in the ability of humans to draw accurate connections between such experiences.

The semblance of truth to be found in drawing such connections depends on "years of hard training, the practiced technique and the meticulously prepared collective context necessary for

the event of its performance.” Performance produces an experience that is a “collective availing of the creative powers of the false incumbent in all experience. It is less a hallucination in the pejorative sense than an *invoked relational reality*.” (Massumi forthcoming, ms. 16) As listeners, we must be properly trained to draw useful connections between our own experiences and illusions produced by music or drama. The practice of appropriate and careful listening allows us to invoke an experience of the illusion that is like experiencing the event portrayed directly. Yet constructing of these semblances of truth create opportunities for the construction of false truths,

“alternate future paths for the world that extend its qualitative-relational universe of life and the forms of life that potentially co-compose through it. Language [and in this context, tragedy], seen from this perspective, harbors what Deleuze calls ‘powers of the false.’... Powers of the false yet correspond to no truth, for the simple reason that they *produce* truths.” (Massumi forthcoming, ms. 13)

This creation of false truths inaccurately drawn from a connection between what is vicariously experienced through tragedy and what can be determined to be true may be part of the fear of tragedy’s power expressed in the *Republic*.⁶ We must be trained to draw accurate connections between our own experiences and experiences relayed by the arts. Without proper training, there exists a danger, for example, that the awe we feel for the drastic actions of tragic heroes would lead us to imitate them, rather than to learn from their mistakes or simply admire their ability to

⁶ It is interesting to note that Plato, while he might fear our creation of “false truths”, has no reservations about constructing a society on his “noble lie.”

act. Massumi's writing provides us with more ways of understanding the *Republic's* stance on tragedy and its musical element. He both articulates the overwhelming and inexplicable abilities of music to inspire a powerful reaction, as well as the potential for drawing false connections between our own experiences and the experiences observing tragedy lead us to feel we have had.

Nietzsche, in contrast to Plato, believes tragedy can help give our lives meaning. In his early work *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche traces the history of Greek tragic art and its roots in the characteristics of the gods Apollo and Dionysus, both of whom are evoked through music. He introduces the Apollonian and Dionysian initially as separate worlds; those of dreams and intoxication respectively. Apollo is a "ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy... the symbolical analogue of the soothsaying faculty and of the arts generally, which makes life possible and worth living." The Apollonian "illusion" veils the world in a manner that makes it appear valuable, "which must have triumphed over an abysmal and terrifying view of the world and the keenest susceptibility to suffering through recourse to the most forceful and pleasurable illusions." By contrast, Nietzsche describes the Dionysian man as having "looked truly into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action." Shakespeare's Hamlet is the example that Nietzsche cites as the Dionysian man, truly capable of seeing the reality of things and their unchangeable and ridiculous nature. (Nietzsche 2000a, 35, 43, 60)

Dionysus offers us something analogous to intoxication. The Dionysian state provides a community in which man's oneness with others is reaffirmed in a state of frenzied self-forgetting. "The artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity." (Nietzsche 2000a, 37) In the Dionysian state, man forgets his rigid, illusory

status and trajectory, and becomes simply a part of a communal whole which includes fellow men, as well as nature.

“For the rapture of the Dionysian state with its annihilation of the ordinary bounds and limits of existence contains, while it lasts, a lethargic element in which all personal experiences of the past become immersed. This chasm of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday reality and of Dionysian reality. But as soon as this everyday reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such, with nausea: an ascetic, will-negating mood is the fruit of these states.” (Nietzsche 2000a, 59)

Hamlet, as the man who has been through the Dionysian experience, assumes an approach to life that is the result of seeing existence the way Nietzsche fears, becoming uninspired to seek meaning and to sink oneself into the forgetful powers of tragic drama. While discussing the Dionysian festivals of Greek life, Nietzsche broaches the subject of music specifically, which excites “awe and terror.” Music, which originally belonged to the Apollonian art as a simply rhythmic representation of dream states, endowed with melody, becomes Dionysian in its emotional power. (Nietzsche 2000a, 40)

Greek tragedy, for Nietzsche, is the result of a marriage of these two states, dreams and ecstasies, and originates in the tragic chorus. The chorus provides an element beyond the poetry which creates a world infinitely greater in its depth, and therefore in its ability to affect the audience.

“Language can never adequately render the cosmic symbolism of music, because music stands in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the primal unity, and therefore symbolizes a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena.” (Nietzsche 2000a, 55)

The part of Greek tragedy which is dramatic action serves the Apollonian, creating illusions through which the audience sees the world from new perspectives. Nietzsche identifies the chorus as the Dionysian element of tragedy because of its power to nullify the viewer, “that the state and society and, quite generally, the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature.” (Nietzsche 2000a, 59)

The importance of the role of music in Nietzsche’s evaluation of tragedy is underlined by his identification of Wagner’s operas as the rebirth of the tragic drama.⁷ Another musical work that might provide a parallel to the combination of Apollonian and Dionysian elements of tragedy is the first movement of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony. This movement, Trauermarsch, opens with rhythmic and timbral gestures which create the illusion of a funeral march. At one point, the strings break from the dirge into frenetic scales, what Theodor Adorno calls “a shriek of horror at something worse than death.” (Adorno 1992, 20) This frenzy might be analogous to the self-forgetting element of the Dionysian. The sense of losing control of oneself, in this case, as a

⁷ While Nietzsche retracted much of his praise for Wagner in his later work *The Case of Wagner*, it was largely for reasons that remain aligned with views presented in this thesis. Nietzsche came to see the theme of redemption in Wagner’s operas as parallel to the Christian and Platonic pursuit of truth. (Nietzsche 2000b, 617) The genre of opera remains, for Nietzsche, an important music genre which offers a modern parallel to Greek tragedy.

response to overwhelming despair is the quality summoned by the Dionysian through the chorus in tragic drama.

The fear that nihilism can destroy both the individual pursuit of fulfillment and productive political interaction leads Nietzsche and Plato to seek sources of meaning for human existence. In tragedy, Nietzsche finds the combination of the Apollonian illusion and the Dionysian state of self-forgetting aggrandizes human struggles and provides an escape from individual burdens of existence. In the *Republic*, Plato seems to be concerned with the unpredictable nature of emotion and fears tragedy's power to create illusion and allow us to forget ourselves. Instead, he seeks a pursuit of knowledge that leads to truth and promotes a hierarchy and balance of wisdom, emotion, and spirit within the soul. The musical element of tragedy can benefit this pursuit if it is limited to the inspiration of certain desirable emotional responses at the appropriate times. Nietzsche's willingness to take a broader view of tragedy's benefits, while they are not all truth-driven, provides more ways for us to engage with others and retain the courage to live our lives.

3. Politics as Unity

Aristotle offers an alternative to the perspectives of Plato and Nietzsche on tragedy. His discussion of tragic drama presents two political benefits that could result from its observation. The first is an edifying experience similar to the Dionysian state described by Nietzsche through which our understanding and sympathy for one another is cultivated. The second is a balanced discourse, which we observe as part of the performance, and which serves as a model for successful political interaction. Aristotelian politics are harmonious and mimic performance.

Successful and deliberative political interaction comes as a result of multiple perspectives working in concert to achieve something as a group.

The educational element of tragedy that Aristotle sees as a benefit to politics is what he calls *katharsis*, a feeling of pity and fear for the characters. What Aristotle means by pity and fear is slightly different from our conventional use of these words. Pity is more like empathy, “suffering with.” It does not have the same sense of condescension about it that pity traditionally does. Fear’s definition is one closer to awe; an appropriate correlation might be to the Sublime, which moves us by being dangerous and frightening. Aristotle’s word *katharsis*, or catharsis, is used interchangeably with purgation, purification, and clarification in Eugene Garver’s glossary to S.H. Butcher’s translation of the *Poetics*. Catharsis comes from the Greek *kathairein* “to purify, purge” and from *katharos* “pure, clear of dirt, clean, spotless; open, free; clear of shame or guilt; purified.” (Aristotle 2005, 506) This etymology suggests the experience of fear and pity is one through which our own consciences are purified, as we observe our inherent flaws aggrandized in performance. Aristotle also believes experiencing an event, a decision, or an emotion, is a better way of attaining knowledge; one that has a longer-lasting effect. Tragedy is able to present both a purification, as well as better understanding.

“Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions.” (Aristotle 2005, 1449b24-32)

The framework in which tragic art is performed allows the audience to experience the events portrayed on stage as if they were real and happening to each observer. A combination of staging and use of music, particularly the chorus, achieves this effect. Just as movies present a story and characters who exist outside the potential influence and interaction with the viewer, tragic drama gives the audience a glimpse into the unalterable lives of its characters. Catharsis gives us a level of understanding, what Aristotle means by “pity,” of the action and the actors that cannot be garnered any other way, save perhaps having the very experience ourselves.

“The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and says perhaps, ‘Ah, that is he.’” (Aristotle 2005, 1448b13-17)

P. Christopher Smith (1999) suggests that the quintessential difference between Aristotle and Plato’s view of tragedy is their position on the elements of melody, meter, and rhythm. While Aristotle believes that these elements are instrumental to the cathartic effect he praises, Plato sees these elements as simply disguising the representation he finds so corruptive. According to Smith, Aristotle believes the emotions elicited by the musical element of tragedy affects us in a way that is equivalent to having the active experience that might elicit those same emotional responses. Aristotle advocates for the benefits of this “direct experience.” Tapping

into the skills that can be acquired and the knowledge that is attained by experiencing this *katharsis* requires the observation of tragedy. To remain anti-tragedy, it therefore becomes necessary for Plato to take a stand against this kind of knowledge altogether. Aristotle's definition of human nature argues that imitative learning is natural and tragedy simply appeals to this nature through reenactment; "We have learned by undergoing."

Nietzsche's description of the outcomes of the self-forgetting state of the Dionysian element of tragic drama in *The Birth of Tragedy* is similar to Aristotle's catharsis. The Dionysian state allows us to experience something outside the immediate realm of our personal experiences. The moment of self-forgetting is conducive to reaffirming connections with others through an impression of oneness.

"Now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or 'impudent convention' have fixed between man and man are broken. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him, as if the veil of *maya* had been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity." (Nietzsche 2000a, 37)

The ability to experience this sense of fusion with others lays a foundation for vicarious learning. When one feels united with others, internalizing their experiences becomes possible. The vicarious experience is what Aristotle values in tragedy and believes can have an educational benefit stronger than any logical investigation.

Aristotle and Nietzsche also share the view that tragic drama gives an aura of greatness to the flaws of mankind. Tragedy, as a representation, portrays men to be greater than they are. Tragic heroes inspire a sense of awe in their willingness to go too far for what they believe. “The same distinction marks off Tragedy from Comedy; for Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life” (Aristotle 2005, 1448a18-20) Flawed and impulsive actions, such as hubris, despite their often tragic consequences, warrant their own admiration. The characteristics of tragic heroes, while not always in themselves desirable, contain a determination to act at all that promotes a sense of knowledge and confidence to be admired. Aristotle says of tragedy, “Imitation, then is one instinct of our nature... The graver spirits imitated noble actions, and the actions of good men” (Aristotle 2005, 1448b20-25). In tragedy, the nobler characters, although often misled, attempted serious actions as a solution to their predicaments. The inclination to approach a problem with a course of serious action is itself a sign of good character. Tragedy, because it portrays a change in fortune from good to bad as a result “not of vice, but of some great error or frailty, in character” is capable of giving us the impression that such errors and such changes in fortune, are human and unite us around common character traits. (Aristotle 2005, 1453a14) Our faults become a part of an honorable struggle that is natural and shared, rather than one that comes as a result of avoidable and individual vice. Despite their tragic conclusions, the struggles tragic heroes encounter are the kind of struggle that many will encounter to some degree and the conviction with which they approach the struggle is admirable. In this way, Aristotle sees tragedy as having the potential to create an empathetic response that better understands struggle, possible ways of dealing with it and the sense that others share similar struggles.

Ultimately, however, Aristotle sees tragedy as an experience of vicarious lesson-learning. A student of Plato, Aristotle agrees in the pursuit for truth and that the practice of philosophy can help us uncover the summum bonum. After opening the *Politics* with his famous statement, “Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal,” Aristotle begins a migration from this bid for man’s need to participate politically towards one for the Platonic practice of philosophy. (Aristotle 1996, 1253a1-2) In Book VII of the *Politics*, he delineates two versions of the best life. The first is the life of the statesman, the second the life of the freeman. The best life is determined to be an active one, but Aristotle defines action in a variety of ways.

“If we are right in our view, and happiness is assumed to be acting well, the active life will be the best, both for every city collectively, and for individuals. Not that a life of action must necessarily have relation regarded as practical which are pursued for the sake of practical results, but much more the thoughts and contemplations which are independent and complete in themselves; since acting well, and therefore a certain kind of action, is an end, and even in the case of external actions the directing mind is most truly said to act.” (Aristotle 1996, 1325b15-22)

By placing the same value on the actions of the politically engaged citizen as the philosopher, Aristotle begins to express his preference for a life in pursuit of truth. Aristotle goes on to say that the best man and the best constitution are one and the same. Successful states are made up

of the best men, who require “excellences of leisure.” The advantages of leisure, which require freedom from political activity such as war, include the practice of philosophy.

“Those then who seem to be the best-off and to be in the possession of every good, have special need of justice and temperance--for example, those (if such there be, as the poets say) who dwell in the Islands of the Blest; they above all will need philosophy and temperance and justice, and all the more the leisure they have, living in the midst of abundance.” (Aristotle 1996, 1334a27-34)

For Aristotle, leisure produces time for the best man to develop, and this development occurs through the Socratic pursuit of truth. When bound to the political duties created by war or times of unrest, we are not capable of pursuing that which truly makes us “best.”

Aristotle is a constant advocate of moderation and the golden mean. He believes tragedy’s educational benefit lies not only in its potential for better understanding a shared human experience, but also understanding the superiority of moderation. By witnessing the tragic consequences of those who take extreme actions, the observer should be encouraged to take a moderate approach towards their own struggles. Aristotle’s view that tragedy might serve as an appeal for the golden mean leaves little room for an appreciation of many approaches to life’s circumstances, the misfortunes of tragic dramas among them. Nietzsche would most definitely disagree that there is an ideal approach to life, such as Aristotelian moderation. His belief is that the grandeur with which tragic heroes are portrayed offers its own benefit. The actions, however flawed, of the tragic heroes inspire awe in the audience. The ability of human

beings to take drastic actions, however poor, in response to their situation promotes a sense of pride, for nothing else but our ability to act. While this can strengthen the bonds between us, it should also give us a sense of individual pride and encouragement. The idea that stories will be told about this event provides an impetus to continue living our lives in spite of our own struggles and disappointments. It is Nietzsche's interpretation of this facet of tragedy that allows him to suggest a lifestyle most conducive to political interaction. The combination of awe for human potential and a rejection of the Aristotelian and Platonic ideas of absolute truth make space for reciprocal respect between individuals and multiple possibilities for ways of achieving successful co-existence.

Plato offers a contrasting position to both those of Nietzsche and Aristotle. If we read the *Republic* as a serious political proposal, Plato advocates for a social and political structure that seeks almost the opposite of the Dionysian sense of oneness with others. Plato rejects political plurality where deliberation is valued and sought after in favor of a dogmatic, hierarchical government structure. The appeal of this structure seems to be its possibilities for consistent and successful political outcomes, which rest on the fact that political decision-making is left to the wisest members of society, the guardian class. The *Republic* argues that the guardians, with their superior knowledge and education, will be capable of making decisions that provide the greatest benefit to all members of the city. Individuals who are not members of the guardian class are responsible for other parts of society; the auxiliary, those who defend the city, and the producing class, those who control and monitor the markets. Class membership is determined early and interaction or mobility between classes is prohibited. Each class is subject to its own education and development, with the guardians receiving the most training. The *Republic's* famous noble

lie is designed for the purpose of maintaining a divide between the classes and the prevention of the feelings of oneness valued by Nietzsche and Aristotle. The noble lie explains the hierarchical structure of this city in which each of its members belongs to one of three classes; the guardians, the auxiliary, or the producers. In order to promote fraternity and keep individuals from questioning their class, they are told that they were all born from the Earth with one of three metals in their soul; gold, silver, and bronze, respectively.

The training set up for the guardian class is most extensive and, in Book VII of the *Republic*, there is a discussion of the political education the guardians will receive. The guardians are required, beginning at age 35, to undergo fifteen years of political education during which time they must,

“go down into the cave again, and compel them to take command in matters of war and occupy other offices suitable for young people, so that they won’t be inferior to the others in experience.” (Plato 1992, 211)

The *Republic*’s concern for the political education of the guardians is significant, taking up half of the total time of their education. Yet the ideal city meets in decline in Book VIII suggesting that even Plato believes a city in which the pursuit of knowledge and the proper ordering of emotion and spirit as subordinate to reason in both the public and private sense is unrealistic and unsustainable, if not unattainable. In Book VIII, the decline of the kallipolis results from inappropriate procreation.

“Now, the people you have educated to be leaders in your city, even though they are wise, still won’t, through calculation together with sense perception, hit upon the fertility and barrenness of the human species, but it will escape them, and so they will at some time beget children when they ought not to do so.” (Plato 1992, 216)

The classes will become tainted through this unjust intermixing and children will cease to be worthy of positions as guardians. The kallipolis’s ultimate decline comes as a result of citizens’s inability to remain constrained by the class rules that divide them. This suggests Plato knows, given the chance, most will choose the sense of connectedness to others that Aristotle identifies in tragedy over a perfectly divided class system in which each is assigned a role. He also clearly suspects that such a sense will destroy the kind of order required for justice. Therefore, tragedy cannot be permitted to exist in the city and promote such unity.

Keeping the city-soul analogy of the *Republic* in view, tragic drama still presents problems that are unrelated to the inevitable fall of the republic. Tragedy is an event that one goes to, experiences, and returns from. If the city is merely an analogy for the soul, allowing the event of tragic drama would require the psyche to split in some way so that one part could observe and learn from another. The aim of Socrates’s discussion of the city is, from the beginning, as a way of understanding the soul. An event, therefore, whose experience necessitates an outside world becomes nearly impossible to consider. Because Socrates is dealing with the internal--justice’s value to the individual--he is unable to discuss the benefits of events involving groups. This decision to investigate the soul and consequently reject metaphors

that consider multiple entities suggests the underlying message of the *Republic* might be the rejection all facets of the outside world. Instead, the purpose of Plato's work might be to advocate for a life outside of politics, in which one can freely pursue philosophy, truth, and justice; the best life for the individual.

4. Politics as Harmony

The experience of being lost in the Dionysian state with fellow observers, in addition to its ability to afford a kind of connectedness to others, creates the potential for a greater appreciation for plurality; an important political tool for the deliberative politics Aristotle imagines. The musical element is itself a metaphor for the form political discourse should take. Aristotle frequently refers to political interaction as a harmony, rather than the unity we find in the *Republic*. In line 1284b12-13 of the *Politics*, Aristotle uses the musical metaphor of a chorus with one member who is able to sing louder and better than all the rest; of course, they would be eliminated from the choral roster. His comparison of ideal politics to a harmony, versus the unity described in the *Republic*, extends beyond the idea of multiple lines working in concert to create the best environment for the greatest number. He also stresses the balance achieved by well-performed music in which each part supports all others appropriately. Executing such a balance politically requires that multiple people be involved in the governing process, each performing their own part while interacting with others. This balance produces a responsibility in each citizen to care for their role in government while creating a sense of trust in others' execution of their responsibilities.

Hannah Arendt, a philosopher heavily influenced by Aristotle, approaches his ideas of political plurality and man's telos as a political animal in her essay, "What is Freedom?" At the conclusion of the first section of the essay Arendt says, "The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom and that this freedom is primarily experienced in action." (Arendt 1977, 151) For Arendt, we are most free in the political realm and this freedom manifests itself in the actions we perform for the sake of principle, as opposed to need.

The space that most people today consider to be freest is the home. This view is especially visible in today's world, in which the issue of privacy is more and more salient to most political discussions. Yet, Arendt argues that this is in fact the realm in which we are most bound to necessity, and least free. The private, domestic realm is that of particular, physical necessity. It requires our continual upkeep to maintain the health and welfare of ourselves and our families. These duties are organic and do not disrupt our instinctual actions for self-preservation. They follow a kind of predestined course of action to be found in any species bent on survival.

It is the public, political realm which is the realm of principle, for Arendt. It is only in the political realm where we are not bound by a survival instinct to act, and instead can act on behalf of something greater than our immediate needs and desires. Political interaction transcends private needs. The actions we are capable of taking in pursuit of something larger than our own preservation, Arendt says, are governed by principles. Human beings are specially endowed with the ability to distinctively act for the sake of a principle. Among such principles are honor, glory, equality, virtue, distinction, and excellence as examples.

The musical characteristics of political interaction are also a theme Arendt explores. For Aristotle, music is a metaphor for the harmony necessary for successful political interaction. For

Arendt, politics is like a performing art because of its ability to transcend time while simultaneously only existing in the moment its creation. Arendt compares the political act to the performing arts. Performing arts, like music, are events which transcend the present in their ability to consume the participants and nullify the individual. Arendt describes the moment of political involvement as one which requires being lost in the action and an utter devotion to what one is working towards, similar to the existence of music only at the moment of its performance. This description has a strong correlation to Aristotelian ideas of music, in which the work only exists the moment it is performed (rather than existing, for example, in the score). It also aligns with the self-forgetting element Nietzsche values in tragedy. The importance of losing ourselves in something greater, particularly those things involving other people, is a possible cure to the problem of finding meaning in our existence. Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of self-forgetting produces a state that is as consuming as the kind of political interaction advocated by Aristotle and Arendt. Nietzsche does not specifically discuss the loss of the individual in a single greater pursuit, but his understanding of the individual's ability to find meaning and purpose in an event shared with others creates room for a pursuit like political interaction. While he does not encourage political interaction per se, Nietzsche does value experiences of connectedness with others.

According to the *Republic*, political interaction, especially between those who are not endowed with the proper ordering of the soul, poses a different risk and contradicts the hierarchical system so carefully laid out in the *Republic*. Discourse has the potential to encourage undesirable behaviors similar to those displayed in tragedy; hubris, short-sightedness, arrogance, all reactions to the input of others. Deliberative politics among individuals ceases to

exist in the polis constructed by the *Republic*. It seems that, for Plato, politics has only two possible outcomes; the static and informed rule of the philosopher or the chaos of interaction that produces compromised outcomes which fall short of an ideal. As an example in Book VIII, Socrates describes a democratic system,

“He often engages in politics, leaping up from his seat and saying and doing whatever comes into his mind. If he happens to admire soldiers, he’s carried in that direction, if money-makers, in that one. There’s neither order nor necessity in his life, but he calls it pleasant, free, and blessedly happy, and he follows it for as long as he lives.” (Plato 1992, 232)

In his discussion of various forms of government in the *Republic*, Socrates rejects the claim that democracy is a “good” form of government. His vision of a democratic government is one in which anything goes, where people lack direction and are at the mercy of their whims, leading to the life of tyranny he works so hard to reject. In practice, a democracy is probably the only other system of those explored in which the pursuit of philosophy would be acceptable. None of the other systems discussed in the *Republic* would happily provide the space for a group of individuals to freely pursue the study of philosophy. Besides the kallipolis, it is only a democracy, where a variety of pursuits are considered equal and legitimate, that accommodates the life of a philosopher. This is not lost on Plato. At the close of Book IX, Socrates argues that the man governed by his immediate desires, as a democracy allows, is in danger of becoming a tyrant.

“First, he is led to all the kinds of lawlessness that those who are leading him call freedom... Then, when those clever enchanters and tyrant-makers have no hope of keeping hold of the young man in any other way, they contrive to plant in him a powerful erotic love, like a great winged drone, to be the leader of those idle desires that spend whatever is at hand... Then this leader of the soul adopts madness as its bodyguard and becomes frenzied. If it finds any beliefs or desires in the man that are thought to be good or that still have some shame, it destroys them and throws them out, until it’s purged him of moderation and filled him with imported madness.” (Plato 1992, 243)

Those, however, who are capable of seeing that only philosophy has a truly satiating outcome will be permitted to pursue such goals in private.

“[Socrates] And he’ll [the philosopher] look to the same thing where honors are concerned. He’ll willing share in and taste those that he believes will make him better, but he’ll avoid any public or private honor that might overthrow the established condition of his soul.

[Glaucon] If that’s his chief concern, he won’t be willing to take part in politics.

[Socrates] Yes, by the dog, he certainly will, at least in his own kind of city. But he may not be willing to do so in his fatherland, unless some divine good luck chances to be his [that he lives in the kallipolis].” (Plato 1992, 263)

Yet, unlike the kallipolis, in a democracy philosophy is not regarded as the highest societal good. The *Republic*'s distaste for democracy is that its "live and let live" attitude leaves behind those who cannot find their own way to philosophy. This is evidence that Plato's concerns about nihilism exclude its implications for politics. He does not consider that the pursuit of a summum bonum might take many different forms which a democracy allows for. Plato's belief in a single absolute truth aligns with the belief, expressed here, that there is only one way to pursue this truth. Even a plurality of experiences along the way to truth, something Aristotle seems to believe possible, is rejected.

Aristotle's own exploration of the various forms of government and the ways in which they are corrupted in Book III of the *Politics* is much more generous to those that promote pluralism. While he initially seems to favor the rule of the great to that of the many, identifying the benevolent monarch and the aristocracy as the best forms of government, he also argues that the many have a just claim to power. Aristotle believes that the collective wisdom of the majority can be more accurate than that of the individual.

"For each individual among the many has a share of excellence and practical wisdom, and when they meet together, just as they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses, so too with regard to their character and thought. Hence the many are better judges than a single man" (Aristotle 1996, 1281b4-8)

Unlike Plato, he believes that the majority has the power to balance the desires of the community and diffuse the vices of both those of great wealth and destitute poverty. In Book III of the *Politics*, Aristotle describes the equivalent to a Philosopher-King by saying,

“If, however, there be some one person, or more than one, although not enough to make up the full complement of a state, whose excellence is so pre-eminent that the excellence or the political capacity of all the rest admit of no comparison with his or their, he or they can be no longer regarded as part of a state; for justice will not be done to the superior, if he is reckoned only as the equal of those who are so far inferior to him in excellence and in political capacity.” (Aristotle 1996, 1284a4-10)

Aristotle’s harmonious view of politics is one in which interaction and the involvement of multiple perspectives and experiences yields the greatest benefits to the greatest number of citizens. Aristotle’s desire for harmony is related to the sense of connection created by the Dionysian element of tragedy. One’s ability to be involved with others and to understand their perspectives is a pre-requisite for a political interaction in which each participant has a unique role that complements and supports the whole.

Nietzsche also holds a view of perspectivism that is a great deal like Aristotle and Arendt’s belief in the interaction of politics as a plurality. For Nietzsche, true objectivity is to be found in the compilation of multiple perspectives. Nietzsche’s description of objectivity develops in the *Genealogy of Morals* around a discussion of a new artistic kind of philosophy

opposed to “the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a ‘pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject.” (Nietzsche 1989, 119) We can be sure Nietzsche is referring here to the Socratic tradition. Nietzsche goes on to say,

“to see differently in this way for once, to *want* to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future ‘objectivity’--the latter understood not as ‘contemplation without interest; (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability to *control* one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affect interpretations in the service of knowledge.” (Nietzsche 1989, 119)

Yet it is not clear that this is the most desirable point of view. Nietzsche adds,

“There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’; and the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity’ be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this--what would that mean but to *castrate* the intellect?” (Nietzsche 1989, 119)

Aristotle believes objectivity creates the most informed basis for political decision-making, and if objectivity is what we are seeking, Nietzsche agrees with the need for multiple perspectives. However, multiple perspectives also present the potential for losing our own insights in their

compilation with many other points of view. The influence of too many perspectives could confuse our own view or cause us to doubt the source or process of coming to these views.

Furthermore, Nietzsche is a champion for the artist, whose work requires perspective.

Nietzsche's writing calls attention to other shortfalls of Aristotle's bid for objectivity. The danger of losing one's own point of view in a sea of perspectives is not only bad for the philosopher or the artist whose work depends on a commitment to their own perspective, but it might also be bad for deliberative politics. To be capable of understanding and considering the views of others, one must be capable of understanding what resolute commitment to those views entails. This understanding cannot be attained without a similar commitment to one's own perspective. Only when we are capable of fiercely defending our own views are we capable of appreciating such a defense by others. Once we understand diverse experiences and the diverse perspectives they can produce, we are able to engage in fruitful deliberative politics.

The *Republic's* resistance to the exploration of multiple experiences, both through political discourse and in the self-forgetting produced by the Dionysian element of tragedy, might align with Nietzsche's warning that perspectivism can confuse us. Socrates argues that some individuals, the philosophers, have a greater sense of reason and reservoir of knowledge. Exposure to multiple perspectives could cloud the knowledge the philosopher has attained through his own inquiry. When there is any influx of information, especially one that consists of entirely new perspectives not simply different conclusions, the strength of one's convictions is tested. Exposure to multiple perspectives might cause us to question, even abandon conclusions drawn from our own point of view. If we have come to these conclusions through a philosophical pursuit of truth, the danger that such reason would be overwhelmed by the

emotional draw of many other opinions is the kind of injustice that Socrates tries to prevent in the soul. By contrast, Aristotle finds the potential of perspectivism to offer more benefits than harm, especially in the political realm where an understanding of the views of others is quite valuable. The pity or empathy that is elicited by the experience of tragedy creates a sense of unity and connection between the events occurring on the stage and the audience. If tragedy is indeed capable of offering a potential understanding of the experiences of others, it is a useful tool in the practice of political deliberation. Being capable of understanding other points of view provides more thoughtful responses to the concerns of a community of diverse individuals, as well as appreciation for views, whether ultimately consistent with our own or not, that alternative experiences might lead one to form.

Despite what he says about perspective and the performance of political interaction, Aristotle is conflicted about whether philosophy or politics is the best pursuit. In Book VII of the *Politics*, he says,

“even those who agree in thinking that the life of excellence is the most desirable raise a question, whether the life of business and politics is or is not more desirable than one which is wholly independent of external goods, I mean than a contemplative life, which by some is maintained to be the only one worthy of a philosopher.” (Aristotle 1996, 1324a25-30)

Aristotle shares the Platonic idea of absolute truth and struggles to decide what constitutes the best life. Believing in an absolute truth means, for Plato and Aristotle, that ultimately there is

only one way to live and pursuing knowledge of this singular truth is the best way to spend one's life. Sharing this Platonic idea leads Aristotle to identify most vehemently the educational experience of tragedy, an argument that appeals to a preference for knowledge over spirit and desire. While Aristotle discusses the value of multiple perspectives in political deliberation, the suggestion that the best life is one led outside of politics in pursuit of knowledge requires that there be a single perspective that we aspire towards and that is correct. Aristotle tries to remedy the politics-philosophy divide by suggesting the best life is one lived in a city so as to maintain external goods and benefit from deliberative politics, but abstain from participating politically in favor of practicing philosophy. In Book VIII, Aristotle says, "The whole of life is further divided into two parts, business and leisure, war and peace, and of actions some aim at what is necessary and useful, and some at what is honourable." The state is necessary and useful, and required for the execution of business and war, but those actions that are honorable, among them philosophy, require times of peace and the freedom from need to enjoy leisure. "For men must be able to engage in business and to go to war, but leisure and peace are better; they must do what is necessary and indeed what is useful, but what is honourable is better." (Aristotle 1333a30-33, 1333a41-1333b2) By the end of Book VII of the *Politics*, Aristotle's Platonic belief in the superiority of truth leads him to favor philosophy over the political interaction he has explored and defended throughout the *Politics* and the *Poetics*.

Although Aristotle's final analysis of what constitutes the best for the individual favors the practice of philosophy, he has consistently examined and advocated for the benefits of political plurality within the state. Nietzsche's description of objectivity is similar to the plurality Aristotle seeks. Yet objectivity is rarely desirable for Nietzsche. He insists that

perspective is necessary but in the defense of our views we must remain aware that they are not singularly correct and that others might be reasonably considered. While Nietzsche's understanding of perspectivism suggests outcomes similar to those of Aristotelian deliberative politics, Nietzsche wants us to passionately defend our own perspective while knowing that it does not come from a larger truth. If we believe the perspectives or experiences of others can be equally valid to our own, we become free to pursue an individual existence enjoyable by virtue of its freedom from one correct path. We also become more tolerant of what the experiences of others might have to offer. Nietzsche's concern for the individual leads him to argue for a lifestyle that is inadvertently best for successful and deliberative politics.

5. Nietzsche's Politics

According to Nietzsche, the Dionysian element of tragedy allows us to forget ourselves and become lost in our connection to others. The sense of unity that we feel in the Dionysian element lays the foundation for appreciating the views of others. The moment of the Dionysian state is in itself frenzied, but when combined with the illusions of the Apollonian, the experience of tragic drama reinforces a sense of oneness with others. Like the bonding that comes as a result of celebrating with teammates, or being rigorously trained with fellow musicians, the Dionysian element perpetuates a sense that "we are in this together." This feeling of community makes the deliberative element of political interaction easier to navigate. Nietzsche would like us to be both committed to our own perspective, yet aware that it is not the only one. The resulting commitment to ourselves and simultaneous tolerance of others is crucial to co-existence, and hence to politics. Nietzsche's discussion of perspectivism explains the merits and

challenges identified by Plato and Aristotle, as well as offers the most politically sound approach to plurality. Nietzsche's idea of existence navigates the dialectic between the solitary, unitary life of the Philosopher-King, and Aristotle's community-bound political animal. By offering multiple perspectives as much consideration as we offer our own, Nietzsche suggests an existence that is faithful to personal preference yet capable of participating politically through understanding for the preferences of others.

Nietzsche does not spend much of his writing specifically exploring systems of government in the same way that Aristotle and Plato do, but he comes closest to a discussion of the function and value of government in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The section "Of the New Idol" describes the state as "the coldest of all cold monsters," "invented for the superfluous." (Nietzsche 1969, 75) Nietzsche likens the state and the power it pretends to offer men to madness. He encourages those who desire freedom to flee the concept of the state,

"The earth still remains free for great souls. Many places--the odour of tranquil seas blowing about them--are still empty for solitaries and solitary couples.

A free life still remains for great souls. Truly, he who possesses little is so much the less possessed: praised be a moderate poverty!

Only there, where the state ceases, does the man who is not superfluous begin: does the song of the necessary man, the unique and irreplaceable melody, begin.

There, where the state *ceases*--look there, my brothers. Do you not see it:
the rainbow and the bridges to the Superman?" (Nietzsche 1969, 78)

Nietzsche appears to share a Platonic rejection of politics; either covertly through the absence of deliberative politics in the ideal city or, if the *Republic* is to be read ironically, outrightly in his favor for an isolated life in search of truth. Nietzsche's aversity to the state rests in its perceived oppression, rather than a desire for the pursuit of something else, as we find in the *Republic*. A free life, which the state censures, allows for greatness. While Nietzsche does not share Plato and Aristotle's belief in the existence of absolute truth, he too sees the state as largely standing in the way of man's ability to fulfill his telos. It is worth emphasizing that Plato and Aristotle are not discussing a state like the one Nietzsche is rejecting. The deliberative political environment of ancient Greece is not equivalent to the bureaucratic state governments of the contemporary world. Still, Nietzsche makes no outright appeal for political interaction, even at a very basic level. His concern is constantly with the life of the individual, yet his conclusions regarding the best life for the individual produce a lifestyle and relationship to the world that is best for successful political interaction.

While Nietzsche and Plato both ultimately reject political participation, Nietzsche most skillfully navigates the Plato-Aristotle dialectic regarding politics. Plato's pursuit of unity, likely attributable to the true aim of the *Republic* (to identify the purpose of the individual life), leads him to dismiss facets of deliberative political interaction for which Aristotle advocates. Aristotle is ultimately conflicted about whether the freedom from political duty, which creates space for philosophy, is the best life. While Aristotle wavers on this point, it remains clear that he believes

political participation is an important part of being human. Tragedy, Aristotle believes, facilitates this political participation by creating a respect for perspective and promoting the connection of individuals through their shared struggles. By contrast, Plato's writing, which reveals questions about the meaning of life and the power of Dionysian musical experience, largely rejects any role the elements of tragedy might play in our inevitable existence with one another. While Aristotle is able to employ tragedy as a tool for broadening the experiential horizons of the participants in the deliberative political process he favors, Plato's primary concern for the individual's life as a philosopher makes no room for events that promote political interaction. The educational stock Aristotle puts in the observation of tragic heroes, however, is largely tragedy's ability to convey the superiority of moderation, rather than give us a kind of courage to live our lives in spite of our human flaws. Nietzsche is the only author of the three to credit tragedy's ability to give life meaning in this way. This facet of tragedy allows us to co-exist with others through greater tolerance of each other and understanding of ourselves, flaws included. This facilitates the most basic form of political participation. Our ability to maintain successful and productive interactions with other members of society is a requisite for building a government that can provide the best lives for its citizens. The life Nietzsche seeks is one that values and defends the individual perspective, while appreciating the perspectives of others. His description of the Apollonian element of tragedy requires and allows us to become lost in an event we still know to be an illusion. Through illusion, passion, and understanding, Nietzsche argues we will become capable of evading nihilism. Nietzsche's concern for our ability to live an individually fulfilling life that is free from the fallacy of absolute truth and the self-deprivation required to pursue it, leads him to advocate a life that is best suited to political interaction. The existence Nietzsche

proposes has perspective, but understands objectivity, seeks a purpose, but understands its limitations, and appreciates art for the illusions it offers, which make life livable. It is the Nietzschean man who is necessary for Aristotle's deliberative politics, and can be so without rejecting the Platonic desire for an individually meaningful life.

Of the three authors discussed here, Nietzsche's writing occupies itself least with the issue of politics. Yet the topics of his work, which offer discussions of the elements of existence such as perspective, lifestyle, and inspiration, explain the positions taken by Plato and Aristotle and inadvertently suggest a life most conducive to politics. While Plato and Aristotle disagree about the constitution of political interaction, both possess a conflicted nature over the purpose of existence. Both are uncertain about what can be made of the power music holds over the soul. Both believe in the correlation between men's ability to attain fulfillment and the structure of government. Aristotle may be the most political author of the three in his discussion of politics as a necessarily human occupation, but Nietzsche's carefully developed ideas about the self, its relationship to others, and the ways we are impacted by the power of creativity, such as art and music, comprise a lifestyle that is most conducive to deliberative systems of government. Nietzsche would almost certainly reject such an assessment of his work, but the view of tragedy and music he holds, which articulate the ways in which they provide perspective, motivate ascetic ideals, and create illusions about life that help us avoid nihilism and co-exist with one another. His writing offers tools for thinking about how to construct a society that appropriately utilizes and understands each of these things, and explains the elements of music and perspective that Plato and Aristotle identify as politically useful in their discussions of government. The application of Nietzsche's idea of an adequate existence to Aristotle's appeal for political

participation provides an alternative image of existence to those of tyranny and philosophy, one that allows us to exist with one another. As a result, the experience offered by music, which Nietzsche values through its role in tragedy, is an important one to our political relationships. Furthermore, thinking about our personal relationship to the world as Nietzsche explores it is a crucial consideration for how we operate communities.

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