

THE CATHARSIS OF AFFECTS AND THE THEORY  
OF CAUSATION.  
A REINTERPRETATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY  
OF AESTHETICAL EXPERIENCE

CORNEL-FLORIN MORARU

**Abstract.** In this study I propose an interpretation of the role the concept of *κάθαρσις* plays in Aristotle's philosophy as a whole and a sense in which we could talk about a "purging" of emotions through aesthetical experience in the field of fine arts. In order to reach this goal, I will try to argue two theses: 1) that there can be no unique aesthetical definition of *κάθαρσις*, because Aristotle treats this notion as a "conceptual metaphor" rather than a definable concept; 2) that there is a link, suggested by Aristotle himself, between *κάθαρσις* and the theory of causation, and that we can speak *κατ' ἀναλογίαν* about a certain kind of finalism of the "aesthetical causality" that has, as one of its moments, the idea of "purging".

**Keywords:** Aristotle; aesthetics; poetics; causality; catharsis; philosophy of art

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aristotelic theory of *κάθαρσις* is, amongst the ancient theories of aesthetical experience, the most influential and, at the same time, the least understood. The reason behind this paradox is twofold. On one hand, the sense in which Aristotle uses the term *κάθαρσις* has been a subject of debate among the modern exegetes since 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance. On the other hand, because of the uncertainty regarding the exact meaning of the concept, *κάθαρσις* has never been included in the context of the Aristotelian philosophy as a whole, but often viewed as a specific term of the Poetics, which does not concern other parts of Aristotle's system<sup>1</sup>, especially the ontology or metaphysics. As far as my knowledge goes, there have

Cornel-Florin Moraru ✉  
National University of Arts, Bucharest, Romania  
e-mail: cornel@cornelmoraru.ro

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Margaret J. H. Myers, *The Meaning of Katharsis: A Study in Aristotle's Canons of Tragedy* in *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jul. – Sep., 1926), pp. 278–290.

not yet been many attempts to include the theory of aesthetical experience among the core parts of the Aristotelian philosophy, such as physics, metaphysics and ontology. Although there are commentators that refer to *Politics*<sup>2</sup> or other parts of the aristotelic corpus of works, such as the *Problemata*<sup>3</sup> for a more precise answer to the question about the meaning of κάθαρσις, a systematic embedding of this concept among Aristotle's core-concepts has not yet been sufficiently developed.

Regarding the meaning of κάθαρσις, even the modern-day ancient Greek lexicons have a tendency not to mention a strictly "aesthetical" sense of the word, even if most of them point out the common, agricultural, moral, medical, and religious meanings. Following this logic, the aesthetical sense is often included as an aspect of the medical sense and of the intellectual clarification sense. This is probably why most of the modern thinkers were tempted to interpret κάθαρσις as "clarification"<sup>4</sup> or "purgation"<sup>5</sup>, leaving behind the other possible meanings the word has in the Ancient Greek Language.

Although these interpretations are not "wrong", they lack the organic character and the context needed to explain the concept of κάθαρσις and the mechanisms underlying the aesthetic experience, because they view aesthetics as a side domain of Aristotle's philosophy, somehow independent from the rest. Of course, we could make this hermeneutical assumption, but I think that, by doing so, on one hand, we lose many hermeneutical possibilities and, on the other hand, we would make a very risky assumption, as I will argue in the following pages. Viewed from the perspective of the whole aristotelic system, the notion of κάθαρσις cannot be understood as a stand-alone concept, but only in conjunction with other concepts like pleasure (ἡδονή), education (παιδεία), learning (μάθησις) and relaxation (ἀνεσις), which are all constitutive moments of the aesthetic experience.

Bearing this in mind, we can say that, as is presented by Aristotle, κάθαρσις is not a concept that belongs to aesthetics *per se*, but some kind of a "metaphor" which was intended to make a connection between some of the medical, religious and common meanings of the word from that period, and the mechanisms of aesthetical experience. However, this is not the only philosophical concept that was thus born. If we think of other notions like εἶδος or οὐσία, we see the same pattern: a common word that was taken by philosophers as a conceptual metaphor to point out to a philosophical reality that they did not have a name for at that time.

The problem is that the meaning of such conceptual metaphors can only be established *inside* a certain philosophical system, because the conceptual context in

<sup>2</sup> The most influential writing that started the main modern interpretation of the subject, is Jacob Bernays' *Zwei Abhandlungen uber die aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, Berlin, 1880 (first published Braislau, 1857).

<sup>3</sup> Nathan Spiegel, *The nature of Katharsis according to Aristotle. A Reconsideration* in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, tome 43, fasc. 1, 1965. pp. 22–39.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Golden, *The Clarification Theory of "Katharsis"* in *Hermes*, 104. Bd., H. 4 (1976), pp. 437–452.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Golden, *The Purgation Theory of Catharsis* in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Summer, 1973), pp. 473–479.

which it is inserted gives its distinctive philosophical meaning. For example, the meaning of the philosophical term εἶδος can only be found by integrating it in Plato's philosophy. Even the later developments of this concept – e. g. in Aristotle or in Neoplatonism – are made by criticizing or integrating Plato's view. This is the reason why, before being an aesthetical concept, we should think of κάθαρσις as a notion that belongs to the Aristotelian philosophy in general and, if we want to unravel its exact meaning, we should put it in connection with other key Aristotelian concepts. Furthermore, by having this connection with the other moments just mentioned, the concept of κάθαρσις maintains profound links with ethics, epistemology, metaphysics and ontology.

This is why, maybe, we should rethink the way we approach this subject starting from the idea of “conceptual metaphor” and the way this kind of notion operates in a philosophical system, circumventing strict definition and abstraction. Having this in mind, we can define κάθαρσις as a conceptual “metaphor by analogy” and put it in relation with Aristotle's theory of causation to see how art can *cause* some alteration of our daily affects, purifying them, similar to the way a medical treatment causes an alteration of the state of health, by purifying the body of disease.

In this study, I will try, consequently, to argue two things. First, that the notion of κάθαρσις can be thought in terms of the Aristotelian theory of causality, if we follow some hints that Aristotle himself gave us in *Metaphysics* and *Physics*. And secondly, I will argue that the meaning of κάθαρσις is more complex than the modern commentators thought. Also that it could be established in the same way as Aristotle created the meaning of being, namely through analogy (κατ' ἀναλογίαν)<sup>6</sup>, and in a certain conceptual constellation, formed by aforementioned the ideas of pleasure (ἡδονή), education (παιδεία), learning (μάθησις) and relaxation (ἄνεσις), all of them being constitutive moments of aesthetic experience.

## 2. THE OBLIQUE INTENTIONALITY OF ART. IMITATION, ILLUSION AND THE ESSENCE OF ART

Ever since the days of presocratic philosophy, the theory of fine arts in Ancient Greece was dominated by two terms – μίμησις<sup>7</sup> and ἀπάτη<sup>8</sup>. Art was thought in terms of “imitation” and “illusion”, but not necessarily in a negative sense, yet also in a positive one. In this latter sense, the “illusory” aspect of art is the essential element that makes us see a work of art *as* art. In other words, ἀπάτη is something that pertains to the peculiar intentionality of the acts of consciousness that constitute the work of art as art, as modern-day phenomenologists would say. Regarding the other term, as long as for Aristotle “art in general accomplishes what

<sup>6</sup> Τὰ δ' αἴτια καὶ αἱ ἀρχαὶ ἄλλα ἄλλων ἔστιν ὥς, ἔστι δ' ὥς, ἂν καθόλου λέγη τις καὶ κατ' ἀναλογίαν, ταῦτά πάντων. (Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1070a).

<sup>7</sup> Democritus, DK B, 154.

<sup>8</sup> Empedocles, DK B, 23.

nature is incapable of finishing”<sup>9</sup>, μίμησις cannot be viewed as simple imitation – *i.e.* the act of copying the appearance of something –, but as a way of intuitively reaching the essence of things<sup>10</sup> and re-producing it in all its richness. Being so, in order to understand the meaning of these two concepts more clearly, we need to reflect upon the difference between the way an object is constituted as a work of art and the way an object is constituted as a thing in general.

Concerning the peculiarity of the intentional constitution of art, we should note that it could be understood only by introducing the distinction between *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*. As it is defined in Nicolai Hartmann’s ontology, *intentio recta* signifies “the being-oriented toward that which the subject encounters, what comes-to-the-fore or offers itself, in short, the orientation toward the world in which it lives and part of which it is – this basic attitude is familiar in our everyday lives, and remains so for our whole life long”<sup>11</sup>. Then, *intention obliqua* refers to “the attitude of reflection”<sup>12</sup> that nullifies the natural intentionality and changes our mind’s orientation in a direction *oblique* to the object. This means that our consciousness is not directed *towards* the object, but towards a *theory* about the object that explains the object by replacing it with an abstract construct founded on theoretical assumptions.

Nevertheless, as contemporary philosophers have shown, works of art are a category of objects – maybe the only category – that *requires* a theory of art<sup>13</sup>. Without it, we would not be able to see a painting *as* art, but as mere coloured canvas, we would not be able to see sculpture *as* art, but as mere carved and chiselled stone. Finally, we would not be able to see a theatrical representation *as* art, but only a bunch of individuals masquerading into pure nonsense. In other words, without an *intentio obliqua*, there is no art. Art always swerves<sup>14</sup> our attention from the object in front of us to a “contemplated object”, filled with meaning by our reflection. If we were to express ourselves more accurately, we would not say that we look *at* a work of art, but that we look *through* a work of art, at the thing it “illustrates”, namely its “subject” or “theme. Consequently, art is a transparent medium, which “reflects” our thoughts, deviating them from the object in front of us to the theme reconstructed by our mind in the light of a theory about art.

This is why, in a certain sense, art without reflection would be nothing. As the ancient Greeks have noticed, art only exists because it parasitizes reality. The

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Physica*, 199a.

<sup>10</sup> “To imitate nature means to make nature more natural, namely to try to cover up the scission that separates it from itself, from its own essence of idea” (Pierre Aubenque, *Problema ființei la Aristotel [The problem of Being by Aristotle]*, București, Teora, 1998, p. 390).

<sup>11</sup> Nicolai Hartmann, *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, translation and Introduction by Keith R. Peterson, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> “But telling artworks from other things is not so simple a matter, even for native speakers, and these days one might not be aware he was on artistic terrain without an artistic theory to tell him so.” (Arthur Danto, *The Artworld* in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 61, no. 19 (oct. 15, 1964), pp. 571–584).

<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy to mention that the English noun “swerve” (derived from the verb “to swerve”) is the exact etymological correspondent of the Greek word κάθαρσις.

works of art partially mix themselves among other beings and they mimic them, so that they can divert our attitude towards contemplation, rather than utilisation. This partial concealment of art's obliqueness is what μίμησις stands for, and its partialness is essential for the constitution of its oblique intentionality. Otherwise, if we would have a total concealment, there would be no difference between art and other things, and if we would have no concealment, the work of art would lose its "thingness".

As we can see now, the word μίμησις has less to do with pure *mimicry* than we would expect. It has more to do with some kind of magic that conceals the extraordinary in the realm of ordinary things. The gestures of the priest during a ritual for Dionysus are μιμήσεις of the God's deeds, just as the gestures of the actor on the stage are μιμήσεις of the actions of the character he plays. In both cases, μίμησις implies some kind of enchantment; a spell that keeps our minds trapped in the story and constitutes a certain vibration that resonates at the deepest level of our affectivity. It is only because the fine arts are "mimetic" that we can see another order of things (κόσμος), *through* them similar to the reality we live in, but somewhat phantomatic and intangible.

Nevertheless, this concealment of the mimetic nature of art would not be possible without ἀπάτη, which is the other main mechanism through which the oblique intentionality of art is constituted. In a positive sense, ἀπάτη signifies a deflection of the mind from concrete aspects of things, a strange erring away from the proper meaning of objects for the natural attitude. In this context, it is noteworthy to say that ἀπάτη had, for ancient Greeks, the same magical charge as μίμησις, as far as it reminded them of the divine fury (ἄτη)<sup>15</sup>. That was the "force" that led the soldiers into the battlefield in the Iliad, the madness of the battle that hides from us the violent reality we face, making us think everything is possible. However, there is a downside of ἀπάτη and ἄτη, namely that the erring of the mind can make one lose all contact with reality. This is why some Greek thinkers, as is the case of Plato, viewed art with circumspection and wanted to remove this "pathological" aspect from art.

If, by the hazard of historical events, we also view these terms with circumspection, we owe this thing to Plato and his critique of the concept of μίμησις<sup>16</sup>, which imprinted in our cultural mentality the idea that ἀπάτη means pure illusion caused by the mimetic process. However, before Plato, the word ἀπάτη had a broader philosophical meaning, which pointed rather to some kind of "seductive tricks". Those were used by artists to catch our attention and persuade us to view the work of art *as* a work of art, not as a practical thing that we can use in our everyday lives or as a natural entity. In other words, the ἀπάτη operates a change in our attitude towards the world or a change in the way we understand things. As it has been pointed out, the "seductive" character of art in general concerns the

<sup>15</sup> The two words are probably etymologically related (Cf. Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 1, Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Respublica*, 601b–608b; *The Sophist*, 264c–268d.

displacement of reality and its (mimetic) replacement with some kind of artistic discourse – be it verbal, visual, gestural or any other kind<sup>17</sup> – that is the “essence” of art. Without this seductive character, we could not decipher the meaning of an artwork, because, for that hermeneutical process to happen, we have to be tricked not to look *at* the artwork, but rather *through* the artwork. We have to leave the everyday reality behind and indulge, for a moment, in the world of significations proposed by the work of art itself. This supersession between the world of things and the world of art is made through *ἀπάτη* and, in this sense; “seduction” cannot be exiled from the artistic object without losing its aesthetical properties. How long this moment lasts depends on the enchantment art exerts upon us, *i.e.* on its mimetic properties. Therefore, seduction and enchantment, *ἀπάτη* and *μίμησις* are the two fundamental moments upon which the oblique intentionality of art is being constituted.

### 3. THE MEONTOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF ART

Consequently, if we accept the essential role of seduction and enchantment in the domain of fine arts, then we have to accept the fact that art, in order to produce what we call “aesthetic experience” it has to be a meontological entity. If the “essence” of art lays in its seductive and enchanting properties, then art is literally designed to make manifest “that which is not” (τὸ μὴ ὄν), a phantasmatic cosmos that does not have any place in this world of ours, a cosmos of the artwork. The displacement that is central to seduction creates an “utopic” or, better, “atopic” world that catches our attention and in which we emerge ourselves when we have an aesthetical experience.

Starting from this “atopic world” of art that breaches into our reality through *ἀπάτη* and *μίμησις*, we can better understand Aristotle’s view on tragedy and mimetic art in general. As we have already pointed out, one aspect of the artistic deceit is that the skilled poet must know how to conceal the “utopic character” of this world of art and persuade us to participate in it. Therefore, what seems strange (*ἄτοπος*) to our reason and to some is even irrational (*ἄλογος*) becomes plausible and even pleasurable by the means of *ἀπάτη*<sup>18</sup>. If this is the case, then the skills of a good poet make the utopic world of art seem almost real for a while, fact that provides immediate wonder. As Aristotle puts it, “one must produce, in tragedies, the object of wonder”<sup>19</sup> and this wonder depends in the highest degree on how the

<sup>17</sup> “*Apate* signals the supersession of the world of *logos* in the place of the epic world of things” (Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *Gorgias, Aeschylus, and Apate*, The American Journal of Philology, Vol. 76, No. 3 (1955), p. 232).

<sup>18</sup> † ἄν δὲ θῆ καὶ φαίνεται εὐλογωτέρως ἐνδέχεται καὶ ἄτοπον ἔπει καὶ τὰ ἐν Ὀδυσσεΐᾳ ἄλογα τὰ περὶ τὴν ἔκθεσιν ὡς οὐκ ἂν ἦν ἀνεκτὰ δηλον ἂν γένοιτο, εἰ αὐτὰ φαῦλος ποιητῆς ποιήσειε· νῦν δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀγαθοῖς ὁ ποιητῆς ἀφανίζει ἡδύναον τὸ ἄτοπον (Aristotle, *Poetica*, 1460a–b).

<sup>19</sup> δεῖ μὲν οὖν ἐν ταῖς τραγωδίαις ποιεῖν τὸ θαυμαστόν (*Poetica*, 1460a).

poet treats the ἄλογος, the irrational, in his work<sup>20</sup> and how he makes it plausible for the public. In other words, wonder arises in art by means of enchantment and seduction through a construction of a paradoxical λόγος of the ἄλογος or rationality of the irrational. Nevertheless, for Aristotle, the irrational part of the soul is the one in which our feelings and emotions reside<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, art provides a “rationalisation” of our feelings and emotions, of our affects (πάθη) in general. In this context, the wonder is produced by the fact that we find some rationality in our wildest affects. This is the main sense in which the promoters of the clarification theory of κάθαρσις understand Aristotle’s theory of aesthetic experience.

On the other hand, wonder is also the fundamental emotional disposition of philosophy<sup>22</sup>. This is why there is a profound and hidden link between tragedy, poetry and philosophy, relationship that could be extended to all mimetic arts, as far as they are also governed by ἀπάτη and μίμησις. Still, in the context of philosophical aporiae such as those exposed in the second book of *Metaphysics*, the wonder comes from another paradoxical state of affairs. By putting our rationality at work, one notices that we can argue for one point of view *and* for the opposite point of view with the same degree of persuasion and logical correctness. But this observation is highly irrational. As a consequence, *the wonder in philosophy arises from the irrationality of reason itself; while in art it arises from the rationality of the irrational*. Aesthetical experience and philosophical experience are linked together as two opposites. This hidden relationship is what makes it necessary to link the concept of κάθαρσις with the aristotelic thinking system in general and to point out the philosophical mechanisms that enable the dramatic performance to produce wonder and purge the affectivity of the public.

Returning to the meontological character of art that sets forth an “apparent world”, in order to understand the cathartic process, we need to see how spectral world of art emerges in the case of tragedy. Based upon this analysis, we will be able to see the relationship between the fundamental moments of artistic obliqueness (ἀπάτη and μίμησις), and the meaning of the “purging” or “clarification” of emotions that the term κάθαρσις describes.

#### 4. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE “ARTWORK’S WORLD”. ITS MEONTOLOGICAL GENEALOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

If we look closely at the definition of the essence of tragedy proposed by Aristotle<sup>23</sup>, we can distinguish the elements through which the world of the work of art is hypostatized into human consciousness and produces the purging of affects.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> ἔν τε τῷ λογιστικῷ γὰρ ἡ βούλησις γίνεται, καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀλόγῳ ἡ ἐπιθυμία καὶ ὁ θυμός· (Aristotle, *De anima*, 432b).

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b.

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449a.

The apparent cosmos or hypostatized world (ὁ τῆς ὄψεως κόσμος)<sup>24</sup> is the first and most important element of tragedy, because, without it, the dramatic representation cannot exist. In fact, this is the first and most important element of mimetic art in general and is the aim of the whole process of μίμησις. The fear and pity that emerge in the soul of the public<sup>25</sup> become purged of injurious elements through this κόσμος, so here lays the answer to the question about the meaning of κάθαρσις.

This “apparent world” is hypostatized, in the case of drama, through music and speech (μελοποιία καὶ λέξις)<sup>26</sup>, two elements that are both characterized by rhythm and harmony, thus manifesting a seductive effect on the public. In fact, it has been shown that, in Ancient Greek thinking, these two elements have medical effects on the soul<sup>27</sup> and on the body as well<sup>28</sup>. Most probably, this idea of Pythagorean origins influenced – implicitly or explicitly – Aristotle’s view on the cathartic properties of tragedy, as long as ancient tragedy incorporated the therapeutic elements of rhythm and harmony.

In visual mimetic arts, such as painting, the hypostatization of the apparent world is made through colours and shapes, but the principle is the same: the “melodic discourse” of tragedy is transformed, in painting, in a “visual discourse”, but, in either of the cases, it is some kind of λόγος that hypostatizes the world of the work of art. The visual discourse also has rhythm and harmony, but these elements are transposed into space, not into time. The rhythm of a visual artwork is given by the repetition of various elements, such as the colonnades of a temple, in the same way as its harmony is given by the symmetry and combination of various visual structures and colours.

If this is true, then both visual and scenic mimetic arts hypostatize an apparent world, built upon the basic, innate gifts of harmony, rhythm and imitation<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless, because tragedy, in contrast to painting and all other mimetic visual arts, is a dynamic art, this hypostatized world is seen in its internal and organic transformations in the coordinates of a story that unfolds before the eyes of the public. This is what Aristotle calls μῦθος, the particular element of the tragedy upon which the act of μίμησις is directed by definition, as long as μῦθος is “the imitation of actions”<sup>30</sup>. As the dynamic element that hypostatizes the “apparent world” of a theatrical representation, the μῦθος makes a synthesis of the individual events in the play and renders a coherent and credible story<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 1449b.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, 1453b.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> “The katharsis is the casting out of emotional perturbation by the rendering of it into the melodic or harmonic rhythm of music and poetry.” (W. F. Trench, *The Place Of Katharsis In Aristotle’s Aesthetics*, Hermathena, Vol. 26, No. 51 (May, 1938), p. 122).

<sup>28</sup> Sonja Weiss, *Medicine for Body or Soul? Philosophical Reconstruction of the Role of Music in Ancient Healing Practices*, *Musicological Annual*, 52(1), 171–187.

<sup>29</sup> κατὰ φύσιν δὲ ὄντος ἡμῖν τοῦ μμεῖσθαι καὶ τῆς ἁρμονίας καὶ τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ (τὰ γὰρ μέτρα ὅτι μόρια τῶν ῥυθμῶν ἐστι φανερόν) (Aristotle, *Poetica*, 1448b).

<sup>30</sup> ἔστιν δὲ τῆς μὲν πράξεως ὁ μῦθος ἡ μίμησις (*Ibidem*, 1450a).

<sup>31</sup> λέγω γὰρ μῦθον τοῦτον τὴν σύνθεσιν τῶν πραγμάτων (*Ibidem*).



This synthesis of the events into a story is what makes the difference between a good tragedy and a bad one. By the concealing of the “irrational” and “irreal” through ἀπάτη, the synthesis of the μῦθος renders the pleasant and wondering character of the aesthetic experience specific to tragedy. Each incongruence in this synthesis snaps the public out of the world apparent in the theatrical representation, back into our everyday reality, putting thus an end to the spectacle and blocking aesthetic experience. Therefore, as far as we can make the synthesis of events and form a μῦθος of the play, we are under the seductive and enchanting effect of the theatrical representation. This synthesis is what “holds” the hypostatized world together and composes it.

If we look closely at this “synthetic” character of the μῦθος, we see that the “story” of a tragedy needs both a principle of unity, in order to make the synthesis coherent, and a principle of change, in order to permit the temporal unfolding necessary for the theatrical representation to take place. These two principles are “responsible for the actions” and, ultimately, the cause of characters’ success or failure<sup>32</sup>. In a more profound sense, they are the internal mechanism that sets the μῦθος in motion and, in consequence, keeps the hypostatized world of the play seductive for the spectators. I am thinking about what Aristotle calls the moral disposition (ἦθη) and thinking (διάνοια) of the characters, two of the elements that pertain to the essence (οὐσία) of tragedy.

If this is true, in order to render the synthesis of events as convincing as possible, the moral disposition and thinking must have a double role. At first, they give individuality and credibility to the characters<sup>33</sup>. Every single role an actor plays has a special moral and intellectual imprint that renders the coherence of individual characters throughout the play. However, at the same time, moral disposition and thinking give coherence to the individual actions and make them capable of joining into the synthesis of a story. This is why ἦθη and διάνοια have a crucial role in upholding the hypostatized world of art.

This being said, we have analysed the essential elements of tragedy and pointed out the relations between them. As we have seen, all the elements participate, in one way or another, in the hypostatization of the “apparent world” of the work of art. Consequently, they form the general context in which tragedy forms as art *per se*. Yet, because mimetic art in general has a meontological character, as we have just argued, these essential elements of tragedy form what can be called the *genealogical context* in which the utopic world hypostatized by tragedy *gets born* and *takes place*. As is the case of all the contexts that hypostatize meontologic entities, this context is the intellectual milieu that pertains to the realm of νοῦς and νόησις and makes theatrical performance possible. Without this context, we would not watch a dramatic representation, but a bunch of people on a stage, uttering strange sentences and doing strange things, with no internal coherence.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibidem*, 1449b–1450a.

<sup>33</sup> τὰ δὲ ἦθη, καθ’ ὃ ποιούς τινὰς εἶναι φάμεν τοὺς πράττοντας (*Ibidem*, 1450a).

However, in order to fully explain the hypostatization of the dramatic performance, we must point out a principle, a ἀρχή that ordines and holds together these essential elements of tragedy. This is the act of μίμησις, which creates the meontological *archaeology* of tragedy. The act of imitation is that which governs the entire hypostatization and makes us notice the difference between the hypostatized world of art and the real world. When we witness a theatrical representation we are, at the same time, conscious that this is a “surrogate world”, different from everyday reality, in which events that take place *mimic* real events, but lack their reality. It is because every second of the performance we are conscious that the actors imitate actions, their imitation does not possess the weight, and existential stakes of real actions, that we can realize the “fictional” or, better said, “meontological” character of tragedy. Moreover, it is because we realize this, that we can turn the hypostatized world of the play into a “training ground” for our own affectivity and, thus, purge our affects (πάθη) of useless and distressful waste. This is where we get to the role of κάθαρσις in the aesthetical experience.

### 5. CATHARSIS AS A CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE THEORY OF CAUSALITY

The main problem with the interpretation of κάθαρσις in Aristotle’s aesthetics is that this notion can only be found in three contexts with an explicit aesthetical meaning<sup>34</sup>. However, none of these contexts includes a detailed explanation of the concept, and we are to construct its meaning ourselves. If we are to judge by its occurrences in the *Corpus Aristotelicum* as a whole, κάθαρσις is, as it has been already noticed, mainly a biological term, and has the preponderant meaning of “menstrual discharge”<sup>35</sup>, although it can also allude to “seminal discharge”, “birth” and “urine discharge”<sup>36</sup>.

On the other hand, there is also a medical use of κάθαρσις, which we can find in the *Metaphysics*<sup>37</sup> and *Physics*<sup>38</sup>. This is also very important for understanding the way Aristotle thought about the aesthetic experience. In both mentioned contexts, κάθαρσις as a medical term enumerated along with diet (ἰσχυασία), medicines (φάρμακα) and other medical instruments (ὄργανα) in places where Aristotle explains his theory of causality. Here, κάθαρσις is linked to the discussion about intermediary final cases and it signifies any purgative used in the medical procedures of Antiquity.

If this is the case, we can assume that this term was used in aesthetical contexts with the biological or/and medical sense in mind, which means that the

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, *Poetica*, 1449b; 1455b ; Aristotle, *Politica*, 1341a–b.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Katharsis*, *Phronesis*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1988), p. 298.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, note 6.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1013b.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Physica*, 195a.

meaning of κάθαρσις is fixed by analogy with these domains. In other words, the use of κάθαρσις in the context of aesthetical experiences may suggest that this kind of experiences produce a purging or discharge of injurious elements of the παθήματα that might hurt the soul, just as the purgatives produce a discharge of injurious fluids that might hurt the body by their presence. Although Aristotle pointed out in the *Politics* to an explanation of the way in which the aesthetical purging of affects work<sup>39</sup>, this explanation did not reach us, and maybe it was found in the lost parts of the *Poetics*. However, in order to reconstruct the definition of κάθαρσις, we need to look deeper into the way the meaning of concepts gets constituted through metaphorical analogy. Unfortunately, an exhaustive commentary about the meaning of analogy in Aristotle is far beyond the aim of this study<sup>40</sup>, but some short remarks on this problem will probably suffice our needs.

Firstly, the definition of metaphor in the *Poetics* says, “a metaphor is an application of a strange name transferred from the genus to the species or from the species to the genus or from one species to another or through analogy”<sup>41</sup>. In our case, the conceptual metaphor of κάθαρσις indicates a transfer of meaning from one domain to another, which can take place only in two modes. Firstly, as a transfer from one species to another – if we think of medicine and aesthetics as two separate domains with no mutual dependencies –, and secondly through analogy – if the two domains have some structural analogies that could found the essential and intrinsic relation of the two.

Another aspect that we must take into account is the fact that, in mimetic arts, metaphors are used to construct and uphold the “hypostatized world” of art, the ὁ τῆς ὄψεως κόσμος. In this case, the metaphor must have something to do with imitation and points to another aspect of the act of μίμησις<sup>42</sup>, namely the “semantic” aspect, which is different from the “magical” aspect that we have already analysed earlier. This aspect aims at our intellect, not at our affectivity and is the property of the act of imitation through which the imitated object “makes sense” for the mind of the viewer. As Aristotle puts it, the πρὸ ὁμμάτων ποιεῖν, the construction of the apparent world of the theatrical representation or rhetorical speech, is equivalent to ἐνεργοῦντα σημαίνειν, *i.e.* the signification of the “being in activity” of things<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν διαίρεσιν ἀποδεχόμεθα τῶν μελῶν ὡς διαιροῦσί τινες τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ, τὰ μὲν ἠθικὰ τὰ δὲ πρακτικὰ τὰ δ' ἐνθουσιαστικὰ τιθέντες, καὶ τῶν ἀρμονιῶν τὴν φύσιν <τὴν> πρὸς ἕκαστα τούτων οἰκείαν, ἄλλην πρὸς ἄλλο μέλος, τιθέασι, φημὲν δ' οὐ μᾶς ἔνεκενώφελεϊας τῆ μουσικῆ χρήσθαι δεῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ πλειόνων χάριν (καὶ γὰρ παιδείας ἔνεκεν καὶ καθάρσεως – τί δὲ λέγομεν τὴν κάθαρσιν, νῦν μὲν ἀπλῶς, πάλιν δ' ἐν τοῖς περὶ ποιητικῆς ἐροῦμενσαφέστερον – τρίτον δὲ πρὸς διαγωγὴν πρὸς ἀνεσίαν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν Aristotle, *Politica*, 1341b).

<sup>40</sup> For a more complex discussion on the problem of metaphor and analogy in Aristotle *v.* Cristian Iftode, *Aristotle. Problema analogiei și filosofia donației [Aristotle. The problem of analogy and the philosophy of donation]*, Bucharest, University of Bucharest Publishing House, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> μεταφορὰ δὲ ἐστὶν ὀνόματος ἀλλοτρίου ἐπιφορὰ ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους ἐπὶ εἶδος ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἶδους ἐπὶ τὸ γένος ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἶδους ἐπὶ εἶδος ἢ κατὰ τὸ ἀνάλογον Aristotle, *Poetica*, 1457b).

<sup>42</sup> κινούμενα γὰρ καὶ ζῶντα ποιεῖ πάντα, ἢ δ' ἐνέργεια μίμησις (Aristotle, *Rhetorica*, 1412a)

<sup>43</sup> Λέγω δὴ πρὸ ὁμμάτων ταῦτα ποιεῖν ὅσα ἐνεργοῦντα σημαίνει, οἷον τὸν ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα φάνα εἶναι τετραγώνων μεταφορὰ, (ἄμφο γὰρ τέλεια), ἀλλ' οὐ σημαίνει ἐνέργειαν (Aristotle, *Rhetorica*, 1411b).

Aristotle says that a seductive trick the poets use in order to create the appearance of action and animation of the characters is done, by means of an “analogical metaphor” (διὰ τῆς κατ' ἀναλογίαν μεταφορᾶς)<sup>44</sup>. This trick “transfers” the attributes of life and soul to something that does not possess these attributes, in order to create the action of the theatrical play “in front of our eyes”. In the same way, we might assume, the aesthetic experience creates an appearance of the medical effect of purging to the way we “see” our affects. This purging, most probably, is a purging of the individual and somatic character that we attach to the παθήματα.

In our everyday lives, the emotions we feel are deeply connected to our individual wellbeing and manifest themselves through some bodily symptoms. For example, our usual experiences of fear and pity – the two παθήματα that Aristotle says tragedy purges – are deeply connected with our individuality and the conservation instinct of our bodily existence. We fear for our lives and ourselves and pity the condition of others because we fear that we might end up in the same unfortunate situation. Being bodily sensations closely linked to our individuality, the emotions of fear and pity are highly disturbing for the soul and, because of this, very harmful.

In the theatrical representation, these παθήματα are purged in the sense that they are being projected upon the characters and are no longer “embodied” in our own existence. They become somehow universal and point to the general condition of the human being, thus evading the closed sphere of our individual lives. The κάθαρσις points out, therefore, the recognition of a more general sense of fear and pity, which characterizes the humanity as a whole. The “therapeutic” effect of art is that it shows us another way to suffer, which excludes self-pity and fear of death. By using the κάθαρσις, we realize that suffering is a general law in human existence and that we should not take it as personal as we usually do. We should suffer with some kind of detachment and peace of heart, as long as suffering is unavoidable and, more than that, a sign of our human essence.

Thought in this way, κάθαρσις is one of the *effects* of the μίμησις that governs art. However, this sentence can be thought the other way around: the purgation of emotions is some kind of a cause for the appearances of the aesthetical experience in our consciousness, as long as every effect can be viewed as a cause for something else. Κάθαρσις is somehow responsible for the emerging of the aesthetic experience, but is not a sufficient cause. It is embedded in a complex of causes that lead to the ultimate *causa finalis* of aesthetic experience, which is pleasure (ἡδονή).

This connection with causality springs from the fact that, in the two aforementioned places in which κάθαρσις has a medical meaning, it is given an example of the multiple teleology of an action. Namely, the fact that the *final cause* of medicine is the state of health, although this state itself has other subsidiary causes that set out the therapeutic process into movement: the diet, purgation, medicines and instruments used *in order to* establish the state of health. By analogy, the *final cause* of art is the aesthetical experience thought as a complex state of the soul as a whole. But,

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetorica*, 1412a.

nevertheless, there are other intermediary elements that contribute to reach this aim – incidentally, pleasure (ἡδονή)<sup>45</sup>, education (παιδεία) or learning (μάθησις)<sup>46</sup> and relaxation (διαγωγήπρὸς ἄνεσιν)<sup>47</sup>. We can think of these “intermediary” causes that lead to the aim of art as constitutive moments of the aesthetic experience.

Finally, yet importantly, the meaning of κάθαρσις as an intermediary final cause of the aesthetic experience cannot be determined in separation to all the other intermediary causes. For a definitive meaning of κάθαρσις, we should determine its relations with pleasure, learning and relaxation, because of the causal context in which it appears. Furthermore, we need to address the question of a type of causation that we could call “meontological causation”, that would explain the way in which we can think the relation between a meontological entity – namely art – and our soul. This is mostly important in the case of κάθαρσις, because it is, by definition, a negative term that causes a privative effect – it makes us eliminate the individual character of emotions that embodies them and can make them harmful for us. Besides this, κάθαρσις is a necessary moment, without which the other moments that constitute the aesthetic experience could not appear. Without the purging of our emotion from existential and bodily attachments, we could not experience pleasure, relaxation, and neither knowledge from art. This is why, for a complete view on Aristotle’s philosophy of art, we should point out clearly the way in which the other intermediary causes are built upon the process of κάθαρσις.

Given the complexity of such an analysis, we will leave it for a future study. For the moment, it is enough to say that, thought in this way, Aristotle’s theory of art and aesthetical experience gets integrated in his philosophical system as a whole, and gets connected with human nature and with the general fields of metaphysics and (me)ontology<sup>48</sup>. In this way, we can think of an Aristotelian metaphysics of aesthetical experience, as well as of an (me) ontology of the work of art, starting from the philosopher’s general theory of causality.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aristotle, (1) *De anima*, ed. W.D.Ross, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967; (2) *Despre suflet*, traducere și note de Alexander Baumgarten, Humanitas, București, 2005.  
 Aristotle, (1) *Metaphysica*, ed. W.D. Ross, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, 2 vol., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970; (2) *Metafizica*, traducere, comentarii și note de Andrei Cornea, București, Humanitas, 2001; (3) *Metafizica*, traducere de Ștefan Bezdechi, Note și indice alfabetic de Dan Bădărău, București, IRI, 1999; (4) *Metafizicia A-N*, traducere notiță introductivă și note de Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, București, Paideia, 2011; *Metaphysics*, translated with an Introduction by Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London, Penguin Books, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Aristotle, *Poetica*, 1448b.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *Poetica*, 1448b; Aristotle, *Politica*, 1341b

<sup>47</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 1341b.

<sup>48</sup> In Aristotle, ontology and meontology cannot be clearly separated, as long as non-being gets ordered into human discourse starting from the same general categories as being. (cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1089a).

- Aristotle, (1) *Physica*, ed. W.D. Ross, *Aristotelis physica*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950 (repr. 1966); (2) *Fizica*, ediție bilingvă, traducere și comentarii de Alexander Baumgarten, București, Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 2018.
- Aristotle, (1) *Poetica in Aristotelis de arte poetica liber*, Edited by R. Kassel, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965; (2) *Poetica*, traducere de Constantin Balmuș, Editura Științifică, București, 1957; (3) *Poetica*, studiu introductiv, traducere și comentarii de D. M. Pippidi, ediția a III-a îngrijită de Stella Petecel, Editura IRI, București, 1998.
- Aristotle, (1) *Rhetorica*, ed. W.D. Ross, *Aristotelis ars rhetorica*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959 (repr. 1964); (2) *Retorica*, ediție bilingvă, traducere, studiu introductiv și index de Maria-Cristina Andrieș, Note și comentarii de Ștefan-Sebastian Maftei, București, IRI, 2004.
- Aristotle, (1) *Aristotelis politica*, ed. W. D. Ross, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956; (2) *Politica*, ediție bilingvă, traducere, comentarii și index de Alexander Baumgarten cu un studiu introductiv de Vasile Muscă, Editura IRI, București, 2001.
- Aubenque, Pierre, *Problema ființei la Aristotel [The problem of being by Aristotle]*, București, Teora, 1998.
- Beekes Robert, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol.1, Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2010.
- Bernays, Jacob, *Zwei Abhandlungen uber die aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, Berlin, 1880.
- Danto, Arthur, *The Artworld* in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 61, no. 19 (oct. 15, 1964).
- Diels Hermann (ed.), KRANZ, Walther (ed.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 2vols., *Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung*, Berlin, 1960, 1960.
- Golden, Leon, *The Clarification Theory of "Katharsis"* in "Hermes", 104. Bd., H. 4 (1976).
- Golden, Leon, *The Purgation Theory of Catharsis* in "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", Vol. 31, No. 4 (Summer, 1973).
- Hartmann, Nicolai, *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, translation and Introduction by Keith R. Peterson, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019
- Iftode Cristian, *Aristotle. Problema analogiei și filosofia donației [Aristotle. The problem of analogy and the philosophy of donation]*, Bucharest, University of Bucharest Publishing House, 2015.
- Lear, Jonathan, *Katharsis in Phronesis*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1988), p. 298.
- Myers, Margaret J. H., *The Meaning of Katharsis: A Study in Aristotle's Canons of Tragedy* in "The Sewanee Review", Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jul. – Sep., 1926).
- Plato, *Sophista* in *Platonis Opera*. (vol. I), John Burnet(ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1902. (2) *Sofistul* traducere de Constantin Noica in *Platon, Opere VI*, București, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, 1989;
- Plato, (1) *Respublica* in *Platonis opera*, Vol. IV, ed. J. Burnet, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968; (2) *Republica* in *Platon, Opere*, Vol. V, ediție îngrijită de Constantin Noica și Petru Creția, Cuvânt preveritor de Constantin Noica, traducere, interpretare și lămuriri preliminare, note și anexă de Andrei Cornea, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1986.
- Rosenmeyer, Thomas G., *Gorgias, Aeschylus, and Apatē* in *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (1955).
- Spiegel, Nathan, *The nature of Katharsis according to Aristotle. A Reconsideration* in "Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire", tome 43, fasc. 1, 1965.
- Trench, W. F., *The Place of Katharsis In Aristotle's Aesthetics*, *Hermathena*, Vol. 26, No. 51 (May, 1938).
- Weiss, Sonja, *Medicine for Body or Soul? Philosophical Reconstruction of the Role of Music in Ancient Healing Practices*, *Musicological Annual*, 52(1).