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Katharsis in Aristotle's Philosophy

ONE OF THE CHIEF OBSTACLES to a study of Aristotle's views on tragic katharsis is the lack of information about this subject. Aristotle gives no explanation of tragic katharsis in the *Poetics*, nor do his other works contain detailed accounts of emotional katharsis. The clearest account of a process of psychic katharsis in Aristotle's works is a discussion of musical katharsis in *Politics* 8 (1341b32–1342a16). This passage, however, instead of giving a detailed explanation of katharsis, refers us, frustratingly, to an account (now lost) in "the works on poetry" (1341b39–40).

In spite of this lack of direct information, however, we can learn a great deal from more indirect sources, such as passages in other writers and related material in Aristotle's own works. "Katharsis" and its cognates occur with great frequency in Aristotle's works, and computer searches now allow us to examine with ease all these occurrences, giving us some important information, especially concerning biological katharsis, that was not available to earlier scholars. We can also learn much from passages in Aristotle's works about "pure" (*kathara*) states of soul, and about psychic treatments generally. The philosophical tradition of which Aristotle was a part provides additional relevant information. I argue in this chapter that an examination of all this material allows us to draw some plausible inferences. First, when Aristotelian physical katharsis is an interactive process, instead of a simple evacuation or drainage, it is effected by means of opposites rather than by means of similars. Because it works according to the "principle of opposites," it should be called allopathic rather than homeopathic, even though it may also have certain aspects that moderns might call homeopathic.¹ Second, Aristotelian psychic katharsis is analogous to an allopathic medical katharsis that removes material harmful to the body. Passages in a number of ancient works suggest that this analogy was widely accepted by other philosophers as well as by Aristotle.

¹ This point is discussed in chap. 8 ("Homeopathy. Theoretical Problems").

OVERVIEW

This chapter begins with a brief survey of the concept of *katharsis* in Aristotle and other Greek writers, especially Plato, and of Aristotle's use of "katharsis" and its cognates

Some statistics provide illuminating background information. A computer search shows that "katharsis" and its cognates occur 161 times in Aristotle's unquestionably authentic works.² The vast majority, 128, are in the biological works, if not always in biological contexts: 50 are in the *Generation of Animals*, 51 in the *History of Animals*, 14 in the *Parts of Animals*, and 13 in the *Parva naturalia*. An additional 45 occurrences are in the medical *Problems*, a work of doubtful authenticity that nevertheless contains many Aristotelian ideas.³ These statistics indicate that Aristotelian *katharsis* is primarily a biological and medical concept. "Katharsis" words occur especially frequently in connection with reproduction. In 59 occurrences (29 in the *Generation of Animals*, and 30 in the *History of Animals*), "katharsis" and its cognates are used to refer to, or in close connection with, the evacuation of the menstrual fluid (*katamēnia*) or of other female reproductive material.⁴ These fifty-nine occurrences comprise more than one-third of all the occurrences of "katharsis" and its cognates in Aristotle's genuine works. In contrast, while the semen is itself "pure" (*GA* 737a29, 765b36, *HA* 635b29), the emission of semen is never, with one possible exception (noted below, in 'Katharsis of the *Katamēnia*'), called a "katharsis" in Aristotle's unquestionably authentic works. "Katharsis" is also used of medical purges (e.g., in *Meta* 1013b1, *Phy* 194b36, *Prob* 864a34, and *HA* 594a29, where it is used of sick dogs purging themselves by eating grass and vomiting). However, "katharsis" is never used in Aristotle's works of the natural evacuation, unaided by

² This includes all the occurrences of the lemmata *-καθαίρ-, -καθαρ-, -καθη-* (exclusive of those derived from *αἰρέω*) given by Ibycus. I adopt Barnes's classification, in the *Oxford Translation*, of genuine, doubtful, and spurious works, ignoring, unless otherwise noted, the occurrences in the fragments and in the spurious works (*On the Universe, On Breath, On Things Heard, Physiognomonics, On Marvelous Things Heard, On Virtues and Vices*). I do, however, take into account occurrences in the doubtful *Problems*, because of the intrinsic interest of this work, and because it often reflects Aristotelian ideas.

³ One of these passages, *Prob* 888a17, presents textual difficulties. Bekker's text, followed by Ibycus, reads *ἀποκάθαρσις*, while Ruelle and other editors read *ἀποκαταστασις*. On this textual problem, see Flashar, *Problemata*, 494.

⁴ Lear, *Katharsis*, 298, asks why no one has suggested the model of menstruation for tragic *katharsis*. This idea deserves more serious consideration than Lear gives it.

drugs, of excrement or urine.⁵ This distinction between katharsis and natural evacuation is apparent at *History of Animals* 578a3, where Aristotle notes that the mule, according to some, "menstruates [*kathairetai*] while urinating."

A survey of Aristotle's use of "katharsis" and its cognates can also help settle a long-standing dispute about the nature of the genitive in Aristotle's definition of tragedy: περιίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν ("accomplishing the katharsis of such emotions": *Po.* 1449b27–28). In the few parallels in Aristotle's works, nouns in the genitive governed by "katharsis" and cognates refer to what is separated from something else. Uncompounded nominal forms of "katharsis" govern the genitive in only three passages other than *Poetics* 1449b27–28: καθάρσεως τῶν περιτωμάτων ("katharsis of the residues": *GA* 738a29); ἡ τῶν καταμνήων κάθαρσις ("katharsis of the *katamēnia*": *GA* 774a1); καθάρσεις . . . καταμνήων ("katharseis . . . of the *katamēnia*": *HA* 572b29). In all these occurrences, a word for the material that is separated from something else is put in the genitive case (i.e., "katharsis of [that is, consisting in the removal of] the *katamēnia* [from the body]"). These parallels suggest that in the *Poetics* also, "katharsis of such emotions" is likely to mean "katharsis consisting in the removal of such emotions."⁶

Additional important background information is provided by a survey of the concept of katharsis in Greek writers other than Aristotle. Many scholars have explored the meaning of "katharsis" in the Greek language generally.⁷ Golden has shown that the adjective *katharos* means "clean" or

⁵ Aristotelian usage differs in this respect from that of the Hippocratic corpus, if Moultonier is correct. He cites *Epidemics* 5, no. 34, and *Prenotions of Cos* 15, no. 297, and 19, no. 371, for instances of "katharsis" referring to "natural defecation" (*Pur.* 159 n. 3). While it is true that excretion is not drug-induced, these passages, like most of the Hippocratic corpus, deal with diseased states, more research would be required to determine whether "katharsis" is indeed used of *healthy* excretion by "Hippocrates."

⁶ Aristotle's use of ἀπο- compounds proves the rule that "katharsis" in its uncompounded form does not take a genitive of the subject from which something is removed. See *HA* 568b9 ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν γονίμων ᾠῶν, ἀξανομένων τῶν ἰχθυδίων, ἀποκαθαίρεται οἶον κέλυσφος ("From the fertile eggs, as the small fishes grow, a sort of sheath is thrown off". Peck), and *HA* 624a15: μίτυς (a substance used by bees) is "a by-product [separated] from wax" (ἀποκάθαμα[α] . . . τοῦ κηροῦ). It is best to avoid applying the terms "subjective," "objective," or "separative" to the genitive governed by "katharsis," since these terms are used confusingly and inconsistently in the literature, where it is not always clear exactly what is being "separated" or "purged" or "purified" from what. Bywater's characterization is unusually clear and accurate: "the genitive after κάθαρσις, denoting the object purged away or removed" (*Aristotle on the Art*, 156)

⁷ The most valuable and comprehensive word and concept study is still that of Moul-

"clear" in a physical or intellectual sense, while "katharsis" refers to an act of making clear or to the process of clarification.⁸ Daniel White finds three groups of "literal" meanings of "katharsis" and its cognates. "physical cleanliness," "freedom from admixture," and "spatial clarity or freedom from obstruction."⁹ Nussbaum follows Golden in holding that the "central meaning" of katharsis is that of " 'clearing up' or 'clarification', i.e. of the removal of some obstacle (dirt, or blot, or obscurity, or admixture) that makes the item in question less *clear* than it is in its proper state."¹⁰ Nussbaum's phrasing, "less *clear* than it is in its proper state," suggests that the concept of katharsis involves not only the idea of the removal of an obstacle, but also that of the "proper state" of something. These ideas are interdependent, for what is taken to be an obstacle depends on what one believes the "proper state" of something to be. Other scholars have had similar insights. Harvey Goldstein writes that katharsis is not only "a taking-away process," but also "a concomitant shaping process."¹¹ According to Halliwell, "Aristotle's notion of psychological *katharsis* combines an element of release with a sense of the improved or refined state of what remains."¹² Stephen Salkever, who notes the importance of Plato's *Sophist* for an understanding of Aristotelian katharsis, writes that Platonic katharsis is "a process of restoring or transforming a thing so that it becomes properly or naturally itself," and that "the process . . . is not one of removal, but of giving the soul its proper form or order."¹³ Finally, Louis Moulinier argues, on the basis of an extensive study of "katharsis" and its cognates in Aristotle and other Greek writers, that "katharsis" in medicine and elsewhere means either "evacuation of harmful or excess material" or the "reestablishment of an order and harmony." "Katharsis" in the *Poetics*, he believes, has the latter sense.¹⁴

nier, *Pur*, especially chap. 3, 149–76, and chap. 5. See also Lain Entralgo, *Therapy*, 127–38, and White, "Sourcebook," who attempts to give "an account of all of the forms and meanings of the *kathar-* root from Homer through Aristotle" (v).

⁸ Golden, "Catharsis," 55–57, "Clarification," 444–45.

⁹ White, "Sourcebook," 1.

¹⁰ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 389, emphasis in original.

¹¹ Goldstein, "Mimesis," 575. Goldstein, however, bases his view on the argument that "catharsis comes from the verb *katharsaz* [sic] which refers to the pruning of trees and vines," and that "pruning is both a taking-away and a shaping, a way of making material usable." In connecting tragic katharsis with pruning in this way, Goldstein follows DeWitt, "Katharsis," who relies heavily (110) on evidence from the New Testament John 15:2.

¹² Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 198.

¹³ Salkever, "Tragedy," 283, 284.

¹⁴ Moulinier, *Pur*, 411, cf. esp. 166–67.

Modern scholarship, then, has demonstrated that "katharsis" in Greek thought generally involves not only a removal but also a "reestablishment of order," a "shaping" process, or one that removes obstacles to a thing's "proper state." A study of individual passages, especially those in the Platonic corpus, can help us be more specific about the Greek concept of katharsis.

The process of katharsis in Greek thought is, in the first place, one of separating. For example, "Plato," *Definitions* 415d4, defines "katharsis" as "a separation [*apokrisis*] of the worse from the better." This passage and Plato's *Sophist* show that the concepts of katharsis and separation were closely associated in Greek thought generally. This is true even though a computer search reveals that an association between the terms "katharsis" and *krisis* (separation, judgment) and their respective cognates is rare in Greek writers, at least through the fourth century B.C.E., except in the works of Plato and Aristotle and in the Hippocratic corpus.¹⁵

Definitions 415d4 also supports the view, discussed above, that katharsis involves more than mere removal. To separate "worse" from "better" is to clear something up, to remove an obstacle, to distinguish good from bad. In many cases, the idea of separation of bad from good involves a very specific concept of what the good for something is. In the typical Aristotelian biological cases, what is good for something depends on what its *phusis* is. In these cases, when the bad has been separated from the good, something is not merely "clear," it is, to use Plato's expression, "purest by nature" (*Philebus* 55c7).¹⁶

That katharsis involves separation of worse from better is also clear from Plato's *Sophist* 226–31. Plato begins by pointing out that a number of processes, such as sifting, straining, winnowing, threshing, carding, and spinning, all involve division (*diarretika*, 226c3), and that all are included within "the separative craft" (*technē . . . diakristikēn*, c6–8). He then distinguishes two kinds of separation, one that separates like from like and has no name (226d2–5), and one that separates worse from better, "leaving behind the better . . . and casting out the worse" (226d5–6). The latter process, Plato writes, "is said by everyone to be a kind of purification [*katharmos*]" (226d9–10). This account of purification as a kind of separa-

¹⁵ Two exceptions, in which the two terms are associated in the works of other writers, are Gorgias's *Defense of Palamedes* (DK B11a 35), where judgment is said to be easy when the truth of the facts is "pure," and Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 8 7 20 3, where the intelligence is said to be "pure" when separated from the body. On *krisis* and its cognates in Greek medicine, see Thivel, *Cuide et Cos?* 180–81.

¹⁶ Plato, of course, does not share Aristotle's biologically based concept of *phusis*.

tion is clearly intended to be noncontroversial, a reflection of ordinary usage: this "is said by everyone." Finally, at 231b3, Plato writes of "the kathartic [craft that is a subdivision] of the separative [craft]" (cf. 227a1 *diakrmonena katharretai*).

Katharsis is also a kind of separation in *Timaeus* 52e–53a. Here, the separation (*diakrmonena*, 52e6) of the elements in cosmogony is compared to the purification (*katharsis*, 52e7) of grain, and both processes are said to separate like from unlike (53a4–6). Again, in *Statesman* 303d6–10, Plato writes that those who purify (*katharousin*) gold separate (*apokrinousi*) earth and stones from it. That katharsis involves separation is also apparent in a number of passages in Plato where forms of the adjective *katharos* or the noun *katharotēs* (purity) are closely associated with *eliktinēs* (unmixed).¹⁷

Two other points about Plato's concept of katharsis should be noted. First, in several passages, Plato makes a connection between an intellectual discrimination (*krisis*) and katharsis. It is easier to judge something when it is pure (*katharon*), he writes at *Philebus* 52d10–e4 and 55c6–9. Again, at *Republic* 361d4–6, Socrates jokes that Glaucon has been "cleaning up [*ekkatharētis*] for the judging" each of the two kinds of people being discussed, as though they were statues. The psychic katharsis of *Sophist* 230b–d also involves intellectual discrimination, although Plato uses words other than *krisis*.¹⁸ Second, in Plato and in other writers, as scholars have pointed out, katharsis often implies not only a separation of bad from good, but also a *restoration* of a natural, good state. This concept of a restoration of order is particularly important in the treatment of disease with medical katharsis. In *Laws* 1.628d, for example, Plato writes of the absurdity of believing that a sick body that has gotten medical katharsis is in the best possible state, while paying no attention to a body that needs no katharsis in the first place.

The idea of separation is central to Aristotle's concept of katharsis, as it is to Plato's. In Aristotle's works, "katharsis" and *krinō* (to separate, to discriminate) and their cognates and compounds (including *eliktinēs*) occur frequently in close association.¹⁹ In some passages, no conceptual dis-

¹⁷ *Phaedo* 67a6–b2, *Philebus* 52d6–7, 53a5–8, 59c3, *Sym* 211e1. The word *eliktinēs* is derived etymologically from *krino* and (probably) from *elē* (sunlight or sun heat) see Frisk, *Wörterbuch*, and Chantraine, *Dictionnaire*.

¹⁸ Golden calls attention to the importance of this passage as evidence for an intellectual sense of "katharsis" in "Clarification," 444.

¹⁹ They are closely associated at *GA* 727a5–18, 728b2–3, 738a27–29, 744a9, 765b35–36, 773b35–774a1, 775b5–8, 781a18–20, 781b2–3, 783b29–30, *HA* 583a2–4,

inction can be made between the two terms. In *Meteorology* 340b8–9 and *Problems* 907a39–b1, the *katharon* cannot be distinguished from the *ekkirmēs*. At *Metaphysics* 989b14–16, the *katharon* is indistinguishable from the unmixed (*amigē*, cf. *DA* 405a17), and what is unmixed appears to be what is separated (*apekekrito*). In *Problems* 883b34–36, bodily katharsis cannot be distinguished from the separation (*apokekritai*) of the residues. At *Generation of Animals* 775b5–8, the katharsis of the *katamēnia* is indistinguishable from their *ekkrisis*. However, other passages make it clear that the relationship between the two terms is not simply one of synonymy. *History of Animals* 583a1–4 shows that *ekkrisis*, referring to the evacuation of urine, is a more inclusive term than *katharsis*, which refers specifically to menstruation in this passage, and which, as we have seen, is never used by Aristotle to refer to the natural evacuation of urine and excrement.

Aristotle also resembles Plato in viewing katharsis as a separation of what is bad or harmful from what is good or beneficial. Aristotelian katharsis, like Greek katharsis generally, always benefits that from which something is separated.²⁰ In the most common kind of Aristotelian katharsis, the *katamēnia* is evacuated, and this consists of residues that can cause disease, as Aristotle tells us at *Generation of Animals* 738a27–30 and 775b5–17. In medical purges, disease-causing material is evacuated. In another kind of katharsis, undesirable people are separated from the city (*Ath. Pol.* 1.1.4), in refining metals, dross is separated from pure iron (*Meteor.* 383a34–b1).

That katharsis is a separation of bad from good is also evident from an examination of Aristotle's use of adjectival and adverbial forms of "katharsis." The process of katharsis renders something *katharon*,²¹ and what is *katharon* has no admixture of harmful or obstructing material. The adjectival forms of "katharsis" are used of clean clothing (*GA* 780b31), clear sight (*GA* 780b32–33), clean water (*HA* 595b30), clean beehives (*HA* 623b27), and, by transference, the cleanliness of bees, who clean their hives (*HA* 626a25). They are also used of a clear mirror (*On Dreams* 459b28), a marketplace clear of merchandise (*Pol.* 1331a33), and bare rocks (*Prob.* 935a14). Water mixed with mud is not *kathara* (*Prob.* 935b25). Intellectual katharsis also involves the idea of separation of ob-

587b33–588a1, *Meta* 989b14–16, *Meteor* 340b8–9, *Prob* 878a7–8, 883b34–36, 907a39–b1, 933b27–28, 941a1–4, *Rhet* 1414a14, *On Sleep* 458a12–13, and 458a21–23

²⁰ Moulmier, *Pur*, 165–67, makes this point about Greek katharsis

²¹ As Golden notes *Katharsis*, like other nouns in Greek ending in *-sis*, signifies an activity and means the process of making something *katharos* ("Catharsis," 55). Of course, something may also be *katharon* without having first undergone katharsis

structive material. This is apparent in the three instances in which the adjectival or adverbial forms of "katharsis" are used of intellectual matters in Aristotle's works. In *Prior Analytics* 50a40, arguments are examined and marked out *katharōs* (clearly); in *Rhetoric* 1356b27, distinctions are defined and drawn *katharōs* (clearly), and in *Rhetoric* 1414a12–14, a judgment (*krisis*) is *kathara* (clear) when relevant is distinguished from irrelevant material.

Aristotle's concept of katharsis resembles that of Plato and other Greek writers in other respects. First, it often involves the idea of restoration of a good, healthy state. This is particularly true of medical katharsis, discussed, for example, in *Problems* 1.41–43 and 47. Second, just as in other Greek writers the idea of separation of bad from good can involve a very specific concept of what the good for something is, so in Aristotle the idea of katharsis often involves a specific concept of what belongs to a particular thing, and of what is foreign to it. This is apparent in *Rhetoric* 1414a12–14. The style of oratory used when arguing before a single judge, Aristotle writes, is more "exact" than other styles, for in this case "what belongs to the matter and what is foreign to it are more easily seen together, and there is no debate, so that judgment is *kathara*." That is, judgment is *kathara* when what is irrelevant to a particular subject matter is easily separated, intellectually, from what is relevant to it.

Aristotle differs significantly from other writers in one way, however. His concept of katharsis is sometimes closely connected with a specific concept of what belongs to a *phusis* of a particular kind. This is especially true in medical and other biological contexts, where "katharsis" and its cognates occur most often. Medical katharsis, as I argue below, helps restore the healthy state proper to the *phusis* of the body by removing material that is foreign and harmful to this nature. A passage in *Problems* illuminates this Aristotelian idea:

Why is it that, if a living thing comes to be from our seed, this is our offspring, but if from some other part, or from an excretion [*apokriseōs*], it is not ours? For many things [come to be] from decaying things and from the seed. Why, then, if it is such as we are, is it ours, but if it is foreign [*allogenon*], not? For [it would seem that] either everything or nothing [that comes from us] belongs to us. Is it because, first, in this way it comes to be from what is ours, but in that way from what is foreign, as when things come to be from what is purged [*apokatharmatos*] or excreted [*ekkriseōs*]? And in general, nothing of a living thing generates a living thing, except the seed. And what is harmful and bad is proper [*osketon*] to nothing, nor is what is foreign.

For it is not the same thing to be [a part] of something and to be foreign to it, or other than it, or bad. And excretions and putrefactions are not our own, but other and foreign to our nature. For not everything that comes to be in the body should be set down as [part] of the body, since even tumors come to be [in it], which people remove and cast out. And in general, all that is contrary to nature is foreign (*Prob.* 878a1–16)

The author of this passage distinguishes between what is purged [*apokatharmatos*] or excreted as foreign to the body, and what is also expelled from the body but nevertheless “belongs to” it the seed. Significantly, in this passage, matter that is “foreign” is matter that is “foreign to our nature” or “contrary to nature.” In physical katharsis, then, matter foreign and harmful to the biological nature of something is removed.

The emphasis in this passage on the idea of the biological nature of something is thoroughly Aristotelian. According to *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104a18, proportionate amounts of food and drink “produce, increase, and preserve” the physical excellence of health. In other words, they contribute to the “completion” or “perfection” (*teleiōsis*) of the body, for, according to *Physics* 246a13–15, excellence is a kind of *teleiōsis* in which something is most what it is in accordance with its nature. Just as the consumption of proportionate amounts of food and drink contributes to physical excellence, so biological katharsis, by removing what is harmful to the nature of something, helps preserve or restore the excellence that is in accord with this nature. This concept of katharsis is apparent in *Generation of Animals* 738a27–30, where Aristotle writes that, in menstruation and “whites”²² “the secretions [*apokrisseis*] of residues preserve bodies, for they are a katharsis of residues that cause sickness in bodies.” Aristotelian biological katharsis not only helps make the body “pure” and “unmixed” with material harmful to its nature, it also helps preserve the body in the “complete” or “perfect” state that is most in accord with its nature, or to restore it to this state.

It appears that biological katharsis in Aristotle involves a combination of the two processes that are separated in Moulinier's account of the “two senses” of physiological katharsis: “evacuation” of something harmful, and the “maintenance” or “reestablishment of an equilibrium.”²³ Aristotelian

²² Whites are leukorrhea, according to Balme, *De partibus animalium*, on *GA* 727b33–728a14. This is a pathological condition, apparently confused by Aristotle with a normal discharge.

²³ Moulinier, *Pur.* 165. Moulinier sometimes writes, as here, of a *maintenance* or *reestablishment* of order, sometimes of a *production* or *reestablishment* of order (167), and sometimes

biological katharsis is a process of removing what prevents something from preserving or regaining the excellence, the completion, that is in accord with its nature. In the next section, I argue that this account of katharsis is most in accord with Aristotle's biological views. Then, in "Psychic Katharsis," I argue that this biological concept of katharsis can also help us understand Aristotle's elusive concept of psychic katharsis. In psychic as in physical katharsis, the idea of the preservation or restoration of the excellence proper to the nature of the soul is as important as that of evacuation of what is harmful. Physical and psychic katharsis help preserve or restore a *symmetria* proper to the nature of body and soul. In psychic katharsis, however, katharsis can also contribute to the production of excellence in the first place, by means of habituation.

PHYSICAL KATHARSIS

Katharsis of the Katamēnia

Aristotle uses "katharsis" and its cognates most often to refer to, or in close connection with, the evacuation of the *katamēnia* (menstrual fluid) or of other female reproductive material. If this is not merely an accident, we need to ask what is typical or paradigmatic about the kind of katharsis involved in the discharge of the *katamēnia*. At first, this kind of katharsis might appear to have little in common with the katharsis of sick bodies effected by medical treatments. Unlike these medical katharses, the katharsis of the *katamēnia* is a natural (*phusikē*. *GA* 728a25) occurrence that takes place in a normal female body. However, a study of Aristotle's views on the sexes and reproduction indicates that the katharsis of the *katamēnia* is indeed like a medical katharsis in some significant respects.

After nourishment is "concocted" into blood by means of natural heat in the stomach and heart, some of the blood undergoes a further stage of concoction into "residues," such as semen and *katamēnia*. The female, however, does not have sufficient natural heat to be able to carry out the final stage of concoction, which produces semen.²⁴ Thus, the *katamēnia*, the female generative residue, is "less concocted" than semen (*GA* 726b31–32); it is "impure" semen:

only of a *reestablishment* of order (411) I argue below that both maintenance and reestablishment of order are involved in Aristotelian biological katharsis, but that production of order in the first place is not

²⁴ I follow the account of concoction given by Peck, *Generation of Animals*, lxiii–lxvii

For the menses [*katamēnia*] are seed that is not pure [*katharon*] but needs working on, similarly in the production connected with crops, when the nutriment has not yet been sifted, although it is present within it needs working on to purify it [*pros tēn katharsin*]. That is why, when the former is mixed with semen and the latter with pure nutriment, the one generates and the other nourishes (GA 728a26–30 Balme)

Here, "katharsis" is used not of the evacuation of the impure *katamēnia* from the body, but of the process that would be required to make the *katamēnia* itself pure. Unfortunately, however, Aristotle's comparison in this passage is obscured by a corrupt text.²⁵ Moreover, it is hard to say whether the nutriment that needs "working on" is unripe (unconcocted) or ripe but unprocessed by humans.²⁶ Parallel passages in the *Generation of Animals*, however, make it clear that the general idea of this passage is that the *katamēnia* contributes to generation by promoting growth because of its bulk (744b32–745a4), just as residues like *phlegma* nourish when mixed with pure nourishment (725a15–17).²⁷

According to Aristotle, the relative coldness of the female, which is the cause of her inability fully to concoct generative residue, is like a "natural deformity". "Females are weaker and colder [than males] in their nature, and we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature" (GA 775a14–16. Peck). The same point is made at 737a27–29 "The female is as it were a deformed male, and the *katamēnia* is impure semen." In a deformity, Peck explains, "*phusis* has not succeeded in achieving her proper *telos*." According to Peck, Aristotle says that the female state is like a natural deformity because he believes "(1) that the male represents the full development of which Nature is capable, it is hotter than the female, and more 'able' to effect concoction, etc., but at the same time (2) the female is so universal and regular an occurrence that it cannot be dismissed out of hand as 'unnatural', besides, the female is essential for generation, which is a typically 'natural' process."²⁸

²⁵ At 728a28, Drossaart Lulofs, *De generatione animalium*, and Balme, *De partibus animalium* (to judge from his translation) read διητημένη (sifted, from διοστράω) Peck, *Generation of Animals*, however, reads διηθημένη (strained off), following Bonitz, and Bekker reads διητημένη. There is another textual problem at 728a29, where one MS has ἀποκάθασον, instead of κάθασον, read by Drossaart Lulofs

²⁶ See Balme, *De partibus animalium*, on GA 728a26–30

²⁷ Peck, *Generation of Animals*, note a on 728a31, cites these passages, as well as *Pol* 1281b37

²⁸ Peck, *Generation of Animals*, xlv–xlvi

This inability and "deformity" of the female not only causes her to produce *katamēnia* rather than semen, it also causes katharsis of the *katamēnia* to occur "When these [sc., the blood vessels] are overfull of nourishment (which owing to its own coldness the female system is unable to concoct), it passes through these extremely fine blood-vessels into the uterus, but owing to their being so narrow they cannot hold the excessive quantity of it, and so a sort of haemorrhage takes place" (GA 738a12–16 Peck)²⁹ For the body to remain healthy, the unconcocted *katamēnia* must be expelled.

Just as lack of concoction produces in the bowels diarrhoea, so in the blood-vessels it produces discharges of blood of various sorts, and especially the menstrual discharge (which has to be classed as a discharge of blood, though it is a natural discharge, and the rest are morbid ones) (GA 728a21–25 Peck)

These two secretions of residues [sc., menstruation and "whites"], if moderate in amount, keep the body in a sound condition, because they constitute an evacuation of the residues which cause disease. If they fail to occur, or occur too plentifully, they are injurious, producing either diseases or a lowering of the body. (GA 738a27–31 Peck)

Aristotle's comparison of the menstrual discharge to diarrhea in 728a21–25 is instructive. Both discharges, he says, are due to a lack of concoction. This is in accord with Aristotle's biological theories, for concoction preserves health, while lack of concoction causes disease.

Aristotle defines concoction in *Meteorology* 4 "Concoction is a completion [*teleiōsis*] by the natural and proper heat of something from the opposing qualities" (379b18–19) "Concoction" can refer to the cooking of food, the ripening of fruit, the digestion of food and its transformation into residues, and the maturing of the embryo (*Meteor* 379b12–14, GA 719a33–34, 768b27).³⁰ The connection between health and concoction is made explicit in *Meteorology* 4

Everything happens to undergo this [sc., concoction] when its matter and moisture are mastered, for this [matter] is made determinate by the heat belonging to its nature. For so long as a proportion is in it [sc., the matter],

²⁹ Cf. 738a33–37

³⁰ Furley, "Mechanics," defends the authenticity of *Meteor* 4, and argues cogently that it is "Aristotle's prolegomenon to his biological works" (93). This book is also held to be authentic by During, *Meteorologica*, and Lee, *Meteorologica*. On the other hand, its authenticity has been questioned by Gottschalk, "Authorship," Solmsen, "Citations," and Strohm, "Beobachtungen."

this is its nature. And so things like urine, excrement, and the residues in general are a sign of health, and are said to have been concocted, because they show that the natural heat [of the body] masters the indeterminate [matter]. (379b32–380a2)³¹

The connections between concoction and health, and lack of concoction and disease, are also clear from many other passages. For example, at *Generation of Animals* 768b25–36, Aristotle writes that lack of concoction causes deformity in the growth of embryos, in the bodies of athletes, and in the disease of satyriasis, in which the face is deformed. *Problems* 959b23 states, "In general, all weakness results from lack of concoction."³²

Aristotle's discussion of how lack of concoction causes hair to turn grey in old age (*GA* 5.4) is of particular interest, for it clarifies his views on the female and her katharsis of the *katamēnta*. According to Aristotle, grey hair in old age is due to "weakness and lack of heat" (*GA* 784a30–32). Because old age is cold and dry (784a33–34), its ability to concoct is impaired: "We must bear in mind that the nourishment which reaches each part of the body is concocted by the heat in each part proper to it; and if this heat is unable to do its work the part suffers damage, and deformity or disease is the result" (784a34–b1: Peck). In old age, the heat proper to the hair is unable to concoct the fluid that enters the hair, and putrefaction results (784b3–6). The putrefied nourishment in the hair is white, just as mold is white (784b11–14). Deficiency of heat can also cause hair to turn grey in sickness, but after health is restored the hair can regain its dark color. Aristotle explains this phenomenon:

The reason is that during a period of infirmity just as the whole body is afflicted by a deficiency of natural heat, so the parts,³³ including even the very small ones, share in this infirmity; also, a great deal of residue is formed in the body and in its parts: hence the lack of concoction in the flesh produces

³¹ The statement that excrement and urine "have been concocted" might seem puzzling in view of the statement at 380b5 that they are "raw," that is, as 380a27–28 makes clear, unconcocted. During, *Meteorologia*, 69–70, on 380a1, gives a good explanation of the apparent inconsistency. "The excrements are themselves of course products of apepsia ["in-concoction," indigestion] (380b5 and elsewhere), but in a certain sense they are also products of concoction, reliable symptoms of good indigestion" [sic: obviously an error for "digestion"]. I am indebted to Allan Gotthelf for helpful discussions of these passages.

³² In many other passages concoction is said to be healthful, or lack of concoction is said to cause disease: *GA* 726a4–6, *PA* 670b4–7; *Meteor.* 4.384a31–33; *Prob.* 859b11–14, 861a5–6, 861b15–17, 861b33–35, 862a34–b6, 862b19, 869b32–870a5, 898a38–b3, 909a35–40, 959b20–30, 962b2.

³³ Peck, unlike Drossaart Lulofs, brackets ἅλλων at 784b27.

grey hairs. But when health and strength is restored, people accomplish a change, as it might be old men renewing their youth, and, in consequence, the conditions also accomplish a corresponding change. In fact, we might justifiably go so far as to describe disease as "adventitious old age" and old age as "natural disease"; at any rate, some diseases produce the same effects as old age does. (784b25–34: Peck)

This account of old age helps us understand Aristotle's views on the female. The production of the *katamēnia* by the female is in some respects like the production of grey hair in old age. Just as old age might be called a "natural disease" because it lacks natural heat, so the female state might be called a "natural deformity" (GA 775a15–16) because of its lack of natural heat. The *katamēnia*, like grey hair, is produced because of an inability to concoct. However, while putrefaction of the hair is not harmful in itself, unconcocted *katamēnia* causes disease unless expelled. For this reason, Aristotle compares the "natural discharge" of the *katamēnia* to the "morbid" discharge of diarrhea (GA 728a21–25). We might also (although Aristotle himself does not do so) compare the discharge of the *katamēnia* to the medical process of bloodletting, which removes harmful, unconcocted material from the body. Like bloodletting, katharsis of the *katamēnia* is neither homeopathic nor allopathic; it is a simple drainage. It serves as a periodic natural treatment for potentially harmful conditions resulting from the natural deficiency of the female state. Because the female needs this treatment in order to remain healthy, she is in a more precarious state of health than the male, who does not need this periodic discharge. Thus, if the female state is like a "natural deformity," it also resembles old age in being, in some respects, like a "natural disease."

If Aristotle views katharsis of the *katamēnia* as a natural treatment for a condition that resembles a "natural deformity," it is understandable that he should frequently call the expulsion of the female generative residue a "katharsis," although he uses different terms to refer to the emission of the male generative residue.

The semen, unlike the *katamēnia*, is a residue fully concocted from "the final form of nourishment," blood. The loss of semen usually weakens the body (GA 725b4–8, 726b1–13) because it is "a separation of pure and natural heat [from the body]" (783b29–30). Only when the semen is overabundant or mixed with disease-causing residue does its emission give relief rather than weakening: GA 725b8–15, 726a11–13 (a passage bracketed by H. J. Drossaart Lulofs); *Prob.* 880a22–29. These characteristics of the semen help explain why (again, with one possible exception) "kathar-

sis" is never used of the emission of semen in Aristotle's unquestionably authentic works. At *Generation of Animals* 773b35–774a2, for example, Aristotle compares the male and female reproductive emissions, writing that "the katharsis of the *katamēnia* is an emission (*exodos*) of seed." However, instead of "katharsis" he uses the term *apokrinomenon* (separated) of the male's emission of semen. At *Generation of Animals* 726a13, *apokatharsis* refers to the evacuation not of the semen itself but of the disease-causing residues mixed with it. An exception in the doubtful *Problems* proves the rule. At *Problems* 880a33, melancholic men are said to want to be purged (*apokathairesthai*) of semen that contains too much breath. The one possible exception in the unquestionably genuine works is *Generation of Animals* 747a19–20, where Aristotle writes that "the seminal *katharseis* are from the diaphragm." While it is possible that "katharsis" is used here generically, of the reproductive discharges of both sexes, it should be noted that this passage occurs in the context of a discussion of tests for infertility in women (747a7).

Aristotle does not call the emission of the semen a "katharsis" because he believes that the semen, unlike the *katamēnia*, is fully concocted by the naturally complete male, and that it is not, except in unusual cases, mixed with the disease-causing waste products that result from lack of concoction. Moreover, the emission of semen is essentially different from the evacuation of a waste product, for it is necessary for generation in the female. In contrast, the *katamēnia* that is evacuated in katharsis is useless both to the female and for generation: to generate, the *katamēnia* must remain within the female.

If Aristotle has good philosophical reasons for calling the female, but not the male, reproductive discharge a "katharsis," it is less clear why he does not use "katharsis" of the natural evacuation, unaided by drugs, of excrement and urine. Surely excrement, like the *katamēnia*, is a residue that must be evacuated for the body to remain healthy. It is possible, however, that the difference in use is due to the conceptual connection of katharsis with disease, and to a tendency to use "katharsis" of a process that is similar to but less "healthy" than another process. As we have seen, Aristotle compares the female to a "deformed" male, and believes that her reproductive discharge has closer associations with disease than does the male discharge. He is therefore more likely to use the term "katharsis" to refer to the female discharge because of this term's association with disease. Similarly, in the case of excretion, it is possible that Aristotle reserves the term "katharsis" for medical purges, and uses other terms to refer to natural evacuation in health.

Medical Katharsis

While katharsis of the *kasamēnta* is neither homeopathic nor allopathic, but a simple drainage, medical katharsis, for Aristotle as for most of the Hippocratic corpus, works according to the allopathic principle of opposites. Katharsis is a process in which opposite acts on opposite because it is opposite.³⁴ In order to understand Aristotle's views on medical katharsis, however, we must consider his views on health.

Aristotle gives an informative theoretical account of health in the *Physics*. He first states the general principle that all excellence, including health, is a "completion" or "perfection" (*teleiōsis*). "Excellence is a completion, for when each thing gets its own excellence, then it is said to be complete. For then it is most [what it is] according to [its] nature" (*Phy.* 7.3.246a13–15).³⁵ Aristotle then contrasts completion with qualitative change (*alloiōsis*). He explains that while health consists in a relation of one thing to another, and is not itself a qualitative change, qualitative changes in the hot, cold, moist, and dry are necessary to its coming-to-be (*genesis*) or destruction.

And again, we say that all the excellences depend on a particular relation. For the excellences of the body, for example health and good condition, we set down as consisting in a mixture and proportion of hot and cold, either of the internal qualities in relation to themselves or to what surrounds them. . . . Since the relatives themselves are not qualitative changes, nor is there qualitative change, or coming-into-being, or in general any change of them, it is clear that neither the dispositions, nor the losses and acquisitions of the dispositions, are qualitative changes, though it may be that they come to be and perish of necessity when other things change. . . . for example, the hot and the cold, or the dry and the moist (*Phy.* 246b3–17)

This account tells us that health is a "mixture [*krasis*] and proportion [*summetria*]" of the opposing powers of hot and cold.³⁶ The important prin-

³⁴ See chap. 8 ("Homeopathy: Theoretical Problems")

³⁵ Cf. the definition of excellence as *teleiōsis* in *Meta.* 4.1021b20, cited by W. D. Ross, *Physics*, on 246a13–16. The connection between "nature" and *teleiōsis* is made clear in *Phy.* 2.8, where Aristotle argues that nature is a final cause (*telos*). See esp. 199a30–32 and 199b15–17. I am indebted to Allan Gotthelf for these references.

³⁶ On *summetria* in Aristotle's biology, see Peck, *Generation of Animals*, Introduction, nos. 39–40. Tracy, *Mean*, 157–222, gives a valuable, detailed analysis of the principle of *summetria* in Aristotle's physiology. He argues convincingly that "the notion of properly proportionate or symmetrical opposites blending in a mean is fundamental to Aristotle's

principle that a good physical condition depends on the *summetria* of opposites is frequently expressed in Aristotle's other works also. In a number of passages, he mentions the common view that health is "the *summetria* of hot and cold" (*Topics* 139b21, 145b8; *Post. An.* 78b18–20). A *summetria* of hot and cold is needed for generation (*GA* 777b27–28).³⁷ The healthy condition of particular components of the body also depends on a proper mixture and *summetria*. For example, the brain cools the blood, which the heart heats and boils, so as to make it "well mixed" (*PA* 652b26–27). Again, a proportion (*logos*) of opposites, in both the sense object and the sense organ, is the basis for perception.³⁸

Physics 246b3–17 tells us that health is produced or destroyed when the opposing powers change. Because health is a proportion of these powers, the changes in them that destroy health must be changes in this proportion, which occur when one or another of the powers is excessive or deficient. To destroy health, then, is to bring about this deficiency or excess, and to restore it is to correct the imbalance. Other passages in the Aristotelian corpus confirm this view. For example, *Posterior Analytics* 78b18–19 expresses the common view that "lack of *summetria* of the hot and the cold is [the cause] of not being healthy." *Problems* holds a similar view: "Why are great changes unhealthful? Is it because they produce excess or deficiency? And this is disease" (859a1–2). Great changes of the seasons produce diseases because the seasons are "hot and cold and moist and dry, and diseases are excesses of these things, while health is equality [of them]" (*Prob.* 859a11–12).

Health is a *teleiōsis* in which the body is most what it is in accord with its nature. This state consists in a relation, a *summetria* and mixture of opposites. Disease, on the other hand, is a state lacking "completion," in which there is no proportion of opposites because one or more of the opposing powers is in excess. Health can be restored by producing qualitative changes in the powers of hot, cold, moist, and dry.

The medical treatments that produce these qualitative changes in the

analysis of man's physical or bodily aspect at every level" (194–95). On *krasis* in Greek medical theory, see also chap. 1, n. 80.

³⁷ While Aristotle does not specify what process is involved here, he is clearly appealing to the principle of *summetria* of opposing powers. Peck, *Generation of Animals*, ad loc., cites *Phy.* 246b4. Moreover, at *GA* 767a15–23, Aristotle compares the *summetria* of male and female to that required for cooking. Sexual reproduction involves concoction (*GA* 719a33–34, 768b27), as does cooking (*Meteor.* 379b12–14), and concoction involves the action of heat on "the opposing qualities" (*Meteor.* 379b18–19).

³⁸ On this theory, see Modrak, *Perception*, 56–62.

opposing powers would, it is reasonable to suppose, be allopathic. Treatments of this kind would be in accord with the general principle Aristotle states at *Parts of Animals* 2.652b16–18, namely, that a proportion of extremes is needed to produce the mean: “Everything needs a counterweight in order to arrive at the measure and the intermediate.” Two passages in Aristotle’s ethical works clearly show that he adhered to the principle of opposites that dominated Hippocratic medicine. In *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b17–18, he writes that “medical cures are of such a nature as to come about by means of opposites.” *Eudemian Ethics* 1220a35–36 expresses the same idea. “Punishments are medical cures, and come about by means of opposites.” In both passages, Aristotle states this principle of opposites as an obvious fact, one that requires neither argument nor explanation. Aristotle, the son of a physician who himself was greatly interested in medicine, would have been fully aware of the medical implications of such statements.³⁹

The discussion of allopathic medical treatments in *Problems* 1.2–3 is consistent with these Aristotelian ideas about *symmetria* and health

Why do they often cure diseases when someone changes greatly? This kind of thing is the art of some doctors. They cure by excess of wine or water or salt or food or starvation. Is it because things opposite to each other produce the disease? Each [opposite], then, brings the other to the intermediate. Why do changes of the seasons and winds increase or stop and bring to a crisis and produce diseases? Is it because [the seasons] are hot and cold and moist and dry, and diseases are excesses of these, while health is equality [of them]? If, then, [disease] is due to moisture or chill, the opposite season stops it (*Prob* 859a4–13)

One important medical treatment is katharsis. Unfortunately, Aristotle tells us little about this process. The only detailed account of medical katharsis in the Aristotelian corpus occurs in the *Problems* (1.42.864a23–b11), a work of doubtful authenticity.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, this passage is a valuable source for Aristotelian ideas, for in many respects it is in accord with views expressed in the genuine works. *Problems* 1.42 gives the following account.

³⁹ On Aristotle and medicine, see Jaeger, “Medicine,” esp. 55–56.

⁴⁰ On the problem of the authorship of the *Problems*, see Flashar, *Problemata*, 303–58, who concludes that the conception and composition of this work as a whole were influenced by Aristotle (356). *Prob* 1.42 presents particular difficulties because it is our most important and detailed explanation of ancient medical katharsis, see Flashar, 327 and 415. My reasons for believing that it contains Aristotelian ideas are given below.

Why do drugs purge [*katharsai*], but other things that are more bitter and more sour, or that have an excess of other such qualities, do not purge? Is it because [drugs] do not purge by means of such powers but because they are not concoctable? ⁴¹ For things that are small in bulk, and, because of excess of heat or cold are unconcoctable and have the ability to master, but cannot be mastered by the heat of living things, and that are easily dissoluble by the two guts, these things are drugs. For when they enter the gut and are dissolved, they are carried into the veins by the same pores as food, not being concocted but mastering, they depart, carrying impediments with them. This is called *katharsis*. Bronze and silver and such things are not concoctable by the heat of living things, but are not easily dissoluble in the guts. Oil and honey and milk and such foods purge, not by means of their qualities but by means of their quantity. For when these things are not concoctable because of their amount, then they purge, if they purge. For they are unconcoctable for two causes: because of their qualities and because of their quantity. And so none of the things mentioned is a drug. For none purges because of its power. Sourness and bitterness and a bad smell are accidental properties of drugs, because a drug is the opposite of food. For what has been concocted by nature becomes part of the body and is called food. But what cannot naturally be mastered, and entering into the veins, causes disturbance because of excess heat or cold, this is the nature of a drug. (*Prob.* 1.42.864a23–b11)

Whether or not *Problems* 1 is authentic, this passage contains Aristotelian ideas. *Generation of Animals* 768b25–27 and *Meteorology* 380a34–b2 give the same account of lack of concoction as due either to insufficient power of the concocting and moving agent or to the excessive bulk and coldness of that which is being concocted. Even the little detail of the "two guts" (δύο κοιλίων 864a29) is Aristotelian, having parallels in several authentic passages. ⁴² Because *Problems* 1.42 is Aristotelian in many respects, it provides some evidence, valuable even if not of unquestionable authenticity, for Aristotle's views on medical *katharsis*. It is also significant in its own right, because it explains, as Hellmut Flashar states, the fundamental principles of *katharsis* better than any other passage in ancient medical literature. ⁴³

⁴¹ At 864a26 I follow Flashar, *Problemata*, who translates ἄπερτα as nicht aufkochbar (= unverdaubar).

⁴² The upper and lower intestines are meant, as is clear from the parallels in *GA* 725b1–2, 728a15–17, and 728a21–22. I owe these references to James Lennox.

⁴³ Flashar, *Problemata*, 415.

Nevertheless, few scholars have given *Problems* 1.42 much attention.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Jeanne Croissant, one of the most influential scholars to have discussed this passage, seriously misunderstood it.⁴⁵ Largely through her influence, it has often been taken as evidence for a homeopathic theory of katharsis. Although Croissant correctly notes (*Mystères*, 93, 95) that a purgative drug is said, in *Problems* 1.42, to have an excess of hot or cold, she nevertheless believes that "purgation . . . makes use of the mutual reactions of two different quantities of heat" (93). In the treatment of melancholy, for example, "the purgative dominated by its heat the excessive heat of melancholics, and reduced it to a due measure" (104). She thus sees *Problems* 1.42 as support for the view that katharsis is a process like that in which fire is extinguished "by the similar," that is, by a greater heat, and not "by opposites."⁴⁶ Croissant's interpretation, however, is inconsistent with the principle of opposites expressed in *Problems* 859a4–13 (quoted above), and it cannot adequately account for the explicit statement by "Aristotle" that a drug works "because of excess of heat or cold."

Problems 1.42 is, instead, best understood as an account of an allopathic katharsis, one that is effected by means of opposites. A two-stage process is in question here. When "Aristotle" writes that the drug masters the natural heat and is not concocted, he is not discussing katharsis itself, as Croissant appears to believe, but a precondition for katharsis. What he means is that the drug is unaffected, unchanged by the natural, healthy heat in the guts. Because the drug is not changed by concoction, it retains its excess power (heat or cold) and so is able to act on the harmful excessive power in the body once it enters the veins. Drugs, as "Aristotle" explains further in *Problems* 1.47, must be both unconcoctable and productive of change.⁴⁷ While *Problems* 1.42 does not explicitly state that medical katharsis works according to the principle of opposites, the author's insistence that drugs work by their powers of heat and cold, and not by mere quantity, makes it probable that this is his view. In fact, the most com-

⁴⁴ This is true of the *Problems* generally, as Flashar notes, *ibid.*, 295. Two scholars who discuss, very briefly, the relevance of 1.42 for an understanding of tragic katharsis are Flashar, "Grundlagen," 42–43, and Spiegel, "Narure," 29–30.

⁴⁵ Croissant, *Mystères*, 93–96, mentions *Prob.* 1.42 in the context of a discussion of *Prob.* 30.1, arguing that musical (and tragic) katharsis is a cure for the melancholia discussed in the latter passage.

⁴⁶ Croissant, *Mystères*, 83; cf. 85: "A determinate quantity of heat is extinguished by the action of a more powerful heat."

⁴⁷ *Prob.* 865a15–16. The connection of 1.47 with 1.42 is noted by Flashar, *Problemaia*, 415, 417.

mon examples of hot and cold drinks are wine and water, and these are used, as *Problems* 1.2 explicitly states, in treatments by means of opposites.

The best interpretation of *Problems* 1.42 is that it describes an allopathic katharsis in which there are several steps:

1. There is a preexisting unhealthful condition due to excess heat or cold.
2. A drug with the opposing excess power of hot or cold is administered, and is not concocted (changed) in the guts.
3. The drug is carried unchanged through the veins where it causes disturbance because of its excess heat or cold; it reacts with the opposing excess in the body.
4. The drug itself passes out of the body (along with the excess that characterizes the drug), carrying with it the preexisting, opposing excess heat or cold that impedes a healthful mixture and proportion in the body.
5. This removal (katharsis) helps restore a healthful *summetria* of the opposing powers of hot and cold that is proper to the body's nature.

Because kathartic drugs help produce the qualitative change necessary to the restoration of the physical excellence of health, medical katharsis is a process of removing what prevents the body from regaining the *teleiōsis* that is in accord with its nature.

This allopathic interpretation of *Problems* 1.42 is consistent with Aristotle's views on change generally. He clearly believes that change can only be effected by the interaction of certain kinds of opposites. This theoretical principle is explained in Aristotle's discussion of "acting" (*ποιεῖν*) and "being affected" (*πάσχειν*) in *Generation and Corruption* 1.7.⁴⁸ Here, Aristotle argues that something can only be changed by what is unlike it in form. According to Aristotle, most philosophers have believed that like cannot be affected by like (323b3–4). These philosophers hold that even cases that might appear to be counterexamples—for example, that of a greater fire putting out a smaller—are really cases of unlike (the greater) affecting unlike (the smaller) (323b8–10).⁴⁹ Democritus alone, writes Aristotle, held a different view (323b10–15). Aristotle argues against the view that like can affect what is completely like: "For why will one be

⁴⁸ On this passage, see Joachim, *Coming-to-Be*, 148–56, Williams, *De generatione*, 119–23; and Mourelatos, "Interaction." Mourelatos calls attention (15 n. 20) to Plato's statement that like cannot affect like (*Tim* 57a), and to Solmsen's discussion (*System*, 356–57). Taylor, *Timaeus*, 389, also discusses *GC* 1.7 in connection with *Tim*. 57a. See also Plato, *Lysis* 214e5–215a1, and compare with *GC* 323b20–24, quoted below.

⁴⁹ Croissant's statement that this process is produced "par le semblable" (*Mystères*, 83) fails to take into account Aristotle's discussion in *GC* 1.7.

active rather than the other? And if it is possible for something to be affected by its like, [it is] also [possible for it to be affected] by itself. And indeed, if things were like this, nothing would be either indestructible or unchangeable, if like were active as like, for everything will move itself" (323b20–24). On the other hand, writes Aristotle, things that are completely different, such as line and whiteness, cannot affect each other either (323b24–28). The correct account, he believes, is that agent and patient must be alike in kind (*genos*) but unlike in form (*eidos*).⁵⁰

For things that are neither contraries nor from contraries do not change one another from their nature. But since not just any chance thing is of such a nature as to be affected and to act, but only those things that have contrariety or are contraries, it is necessary for the agent and the patient to be like and the same in kind, but unlike and contrary in form. (For body is of such a nature as to be affected by body, flavor by flavor, color by color, and in general that which is like in kind by that which is like in kind. And the cause of this is that all the contraries are in the same kind, and the contraries act and are affected by one other.) Thus, it is necessary for the agent and patient to be the same in one way, and different and unlike each other in another way. And since the patient and the agent are the same and like in kind, but unlike in form, and the contraries are of this sort, it is clear that the contraries and the intermediates are affected by and act upon each other. For destruction and coming to be consist entirely in these [processes] (323b28–324a9)⁵¹

The general principle is summed up at *De anima* 417a18–20: "It is possible in one way for something to be affected by like, and in another way by unlike, as we have said. For it is affected by unlike, but when it has been affected it is like."⁵²

Harold Joachim explains in *Coming-to-Be* that, according to Aristotle,

⁵⁰ In translating *genos* and *eidos* as "kind" and "form" respectively (and not as 'genus' and 'species'), I follow Lennox, "Kinds," 339 n. I owe this reference to Allan Gotthelf.

⁵¹ I translate *enantia* as "contraries" rather than "opposites" in this passage because Aristotle uses this term in a specific technical sense to refer to contrary forms within the same kind. For his views on contrariety in *Generation and Corruption*, see Joachim, *Coming-to-Be*, esp. 198–203. In many other passages in Aristotle, however, *enantia* has its ordinary Greek sense, as Bontz notes. We cannot assume, for example, that the *enantia* by means of which medicine is said to work in *EN* 1104b18 are contraries in the technical sense of *Generation and Corruption*. Thus, in most other cases I use the more general English term 'opposite' to translate *enantia*, and I refer to agent and patient as 'opposites.'

⁵² Joachim, *Coming-to-Be*, 152, calls attention to this parallel passage and notes that at 417a1–2 there is an explicit reference to *GC* 323b29–324a9.

"the true doctrine is that action-passion takes place between things which are contrary forms of the same matter, differentiations of an identical *substratum*, contrasted species within the same genus. Agent and patient, therefore, are both 'like' and 'unlike'. The result of action-passion is to assimilate the patient to the agent" (151-52). Confusions arise, however, because "linguistic usage attributes action and passion now to the *substratum* and now to the *contraries*, and the false theories arose from exclusive attention to the one or the other of these subjects, of which action and passion are commonly predicated" (148).

According to Aristotle, the unqualified statement that "like affects like" and the unqualified statement that "unlike affects unlike" are both potentially misleading. The true account, in his view, is that one thing can affect another only when it is the same in kind but opposite in form. According to this theory, things that differ in degree (for example, greater and lesser fires) affect one another not because they are like, but because they are unlike. "it is affected by the unlike" (*DA* 417a20). While what is like (in kind) is affected by what is like (in kind), it can only be affected because it is unlike and opposite (in form), and never because it is like ("as like". *GC* 323b23). In other words, action and passion are always *allopathic* and never *homeopathic*.

To understand particular cases of acting and being affected, we need to determine in what specific respects agent and patient are like and unlike. For example, in *Generation of Animals*, the semen is said to "set" the female's *katamēnia* just as rennet "sets" milk. "The secretion of the female in the uterus is set by the male seed, which latter has an effect on it like that of rennet on milk. For rennet is milk having vital heat, which draws together what is like into one and sets it, and the seed has the same effect on the nature of the *katamēnia*. For milk and the *katamēnia* have the same nature" (*GA* 739b20-25). This passage makes it clear that rennet and milk are like, but also unlike, in just the way *Generation and Corruption* requires: "Rennet is milk having vital heat." Rennet and milk, that is, are the same in kind (both are milk), but unlike and opposite in form. one is hot and the other cold.⁵³ Similarly, in the case of the restoration of health produced by medical katharsis, the drug must also be like (in kind) that which it affects in the body, but unlike and opposite in being hot, cold, moist, or dry. This theory helps explain *Problems* 1.42. Because bronze and

⁵³ Williams, *De generatione*, 121 (quoted with approval by Mourelatos, "Interaction," 7) misunderstands the rennet example when he uses it to illustrate an objection to Aristotle's theory of acting and being affected "Rennet has apparently nothing in common with solidity, but if added to milk, will solidify it"

silver are not like food, which can be assimilated and made part of the body, they cannot act on the body and produce katharsis. Being unlike nourishment, they are not dissolved by the guts. Drugs, however, are like the food that is assimilated by the body, and therefore they can be dissolved in the guts and carried into the veins. They are, however, unlike the disease-causing material in respect to the powers of hot, cold, moist, and dry, and so are able to act on this material. They can then produce an allopathic katharsis.

The view that Aristotle adhered to the allopathic principle of opposites, then, is supported by the ideas on health in his biological works, by Aristotle's statements in the ethical works that medical treatments work by means of opposites, by the theoretical discussion of acting and being affected in the *Generation and Corruption*, and by Aristotelian ideas in the *Problems*. The *Problems* also supports the view that katharsis, like other medical treatments, works according to the principle of opposites. Aristotle's views on biology and medicine illuminate his ideas about psychic excellence and katharsis. In this area also, a principle of opposites is extremely important.

PSYCHIC KATHARSIS

Although Aristotle frequently refers to biological katharsis, he very seldom mentions psychic katharsis. In trying to determine what his views on the latter are, we are forced to rely on more indirect information. Accordingly, this section draws some probable inferences from information provided by a variety of sources. It begins ("Purity") with a study of some of the material related to psychic katharsis: the references scattered throughout Aristotle's works to a pure (*katharon*) state of the soul and its various activities, such as sensation, understanding, and contemplation. A study of these passages indicates that the adjective *katharon* and the noun *kathareiotēs* (purity) are used of things that are most closely connected with the rational part of the soul, that which is most proper to the nature and excellence of a human being. While these passages do not give us explicit information about a process by means of which the soul might be made pure (katharsis), the parallels Aristotle draws between physical and psychic excellence allow us to make some inferences about what such a process might be. These parallels are discussed in "Psychic and Physical Excellence." Next, "*Politics* 8" examines the account of psychic katharsis given in that book, arguing that religious-musical katharsis is best interpreted,

contrary to the usual view, as analogous to a medical katharsis by means of opposites. After this, two other analogies are studied ("Iron and Wood"). Aristotle compares treatments of the soul by means of opposites to two physical processes that also work by means of opposites: straightening bent wood and tempering iron. Although he does not call these psychic treatments "katharseis," they certainly resemble allopathic medical katharseis. Further evidence that these psychic treatments would have been called "katharseis" in antiquity is provided by other writers. Seen from this broader perspective, Aristotle's analogies provide some evidence that he was working in a tradition that generally accepted the idea of an allopathic katharsis of the soul. The section on psychic katharsis concludes ("The Platonic Elenchus") with a study of an important philosophical document that may well have influenced Aristotle: *Sophist* 230, where Plato discusses a "katharsis concerning the soul." This kathartic process is similar in many ways to the medical katharsis of *Problems* 1.42 examined above. The *Sophist* passage is also significant because it shows us some specific ways in which psychic katharsis differs from physical katharsis. This background material will help us, in the next chapter, understand Aristotelian tragic katharsis.

Purity

In a number of passages in the Aristotelian corpus the adjective *katharon* and the noun *kathareiotēs* are used of the soul or of what is closely connected to it. Aristotle twice quotes Anaxagoras, who held that mind is "simple, and unmixed, and *katharon*" (*De anima* 405a16–17), and that mind alone is "unmixed and *katharon*" (*Meta.* 989b15–16). The spurious work *On Breath* also connects the soul with purity. "What is naturally united with the soul is purer" (481a17). These passages provide some evidence that the soul was traditionally thought to be pure.

According to Aristotle himself, a *katharon* state is specifically connected with the rational part of the soul. On the physiological level, intelligence is associated with pure blood, as opposed to blood mixed with earthy elements.⁵⁴ Humans, Aristotle believes, have the purest blood of all living things (*HA* 521a2–3). Moreover, the senses of sight, sound, and smell are purer than those of taste and touch (*EN* 1175b36–1176a1) because they

⁵⁴ *PA* 648a2–13, 650b18–24; cf. *On Sleep* 458a10–25, where sleep is said to be caused by impurities in the blood that incapacitate the primary sense-organ. Peck, *Parts of Animals*, 136 n., compares these *Parts of Animals* passages with "Hippocrates," *Regimen* 1.35, on which see Hüffmeier, "Phronesis," esp. 77–84.

are more closely connected with the rational part of the soul. The pleasures connected with sight, sound, and smell resemble, according to Aristotle, the intellectual pleasures of learning, remembering, and hoping in that they are unmixed with pain (EN 1173b16–19). Physical pleasures like those of eating, on the other hand, are preceded by a painful lack (1173b13–15).

Aristotle's discussion (EN 3 10) of the pleasures with which *sôphrosunê* is concerned clarifies why sight, sound, and smell are more closely connected with the rational part of the soul than are taste and touch. Aristotle begins by distinguishing psychic pleasures, such as love of honor and love of learning, from bodily pleasures. He believes that *sôphrosunê* is concerned with only some of the latter (1117b28–1118a3). We are, he writes, neither temperate nor licentious with respect to the pleasures of sight, smell, and sound (1118a3–12), but only with respect to those of touch and taste (1118a23–26). Because touch and taste are the pleasures we share with other animals, they appear "slavish and bestial" (1118a24–26). Aristotle's distinction among the physical pleasures is made on the basis of whether or not they have some connection with the intellectual capacities. He says licentiousness is, strictly speaking, concerned only with touch, because taste has to do with discrimination (*krisis*) of flavors (1118a26–32). Thus, the pleasures of taste are more closely associated with the intellect than are those of touch, such as eating, drinking, and sex (1118a31).⁵⁵ Aristotle remarks, significantly, that licentiousness, the excessive enjoyment of the pleasures of touch, "belongs to us not as human beings, but as animals" (1118b2–3). This remark allows us to infer that the purer pleasures of sight, sound, and smell, and of taste insofar as it involves discrimination, are pleasures more closely connected with our natures as (rational) human beings.

The point that pure pleasure is associated with the rational part of the soul is made more explicitly in connection with philosophy and contemplation (*theôria*). Philosophy, Aristotle writes, "is thought to have marvelous pleasures, for purity [*kathareiotês*] and stability" (EN 1177a25–26). It is "the most pleasant of all activities in accord with excellence" (1177a23–24). The contemplative life is the most divine (1177b26–31), and theoretical comprehension (*nous*) is least bound up with the "compound" of body and soul (1178a19–22). *Theôria* has these characteristics because it is the activity most proper to the nature of human beings. "That which is

⁵⁵ For a good discussion of this rather puzzling account of *sôphrosunê*, see Young, "Temperance."

proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for it. And for a human being [this is] the life in accord with [theoretical] *nous*, since this is most of all a human being. And this life is therefore also most happy" (1178a5–8). The pleasure of contemplation is also pure because it is unmixed with pain: "There are also pleasures without pain and desire, for example, those of contemplation, when our nature lacks nothing" (1152b36–1153a2).

Pure pleasures in Aristotle's view are those most proper to our nature as rational beings. Such pleasures are also most "complete" (or "perfect"), and belong to the most "complete" human being: "Whether the [activities] of the complete [*teleiou*] and blessed man are one or more than one, the pleasures that complete [*teleiousai*] these activities should be said in the strict sense to be the pleasures of a human being" (EN 1176a26–28).³⁶

A study of passages in which *katharon* and *kathareiotēs* are used in connection with the soul indicates that purity is closely associated with the rational part of the soul, the activity of which is proper to the nature of a human being. While these passages do not give us any information about a process by means of which the soul might be made pure (katharsis), some inferences about what such a process might be can be drawn from Aristotle's statements about the similarities between physical and psychic excellence.

Psychic and Physical Excellence

In *Physics* 7.3, Aristotle states that excellence is a *teleiōsis* in which something is most what it is in accord with its nature (246a13–15). This general principle is first applied to excellence of the body: health and good condition (246b4–20). It is then applied to psychic excellence: "And similarly in the case of the dispositions of the soul. All of these depend on a certain relation, and the excellences are *teleiōseis*, the vices departures [from this relation]" (*Phy.* 246b20–247a3). Just as health is a "completion" or "perfection" of the physical nature of a living thing, so psychic excellence is a "completion" or "perfection" of the psychic nature of a human being.

³⁶ The question of the relationships in the *Nicomachean Ethics* among nature, completion, pleasure, and *theōria* involves too many controversial issues to repay study here. *Phy.* 7.3, discussed below, makes it clear without raising these difficulties that psychic, like physical, excellence is a *teleiōsis* in which the nature of something is realized. Some recent discussions of these controversial issues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are those of Owen, "Aristotelian Pleasures"; Gosling and Taylor, *Pleasure*, 204–24, Ackrill, "Eudaimonia"; J. M. Cooper, "Contemplation", and Kraut, *Aristotle*.

Physical excellence is a relation consisting in "a mixture and proportion of hot and cold, either of the internal qualities in relation to themselves or to what surrounds them" (*Phy.* 246b5–6). One kind of psychic excellence, "ethical excellence," according to the *Physics*, is a relation "concerned with bodily pleasures and pains" (247a7–8). Just as health comes to be or perishes when qualitative changes in the hot, cold, moist, or dry take place (246b14–17), so ethical excellence comes to be or perishes when changes concerning pleasures and pains take place, for these are qualitative changes in the perceptive part of the soul (247a4–19).

The parallel between physical and psychic excellence does not, it should be noted, hold in one respect. Physical excellence consists in a *summetria* of the opposites hot and cold. In the *Physics*, as in the ethical works, however, psychic excellence does not consist in, but is "concerned with," a *summetria* of pleasure and pain. As *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104a11–b2 tells us, the mean state concerning pleasure and pain helps produce and maintain excellence, while excess and deficiency destroy it. A correct mixture and proportion of the opposites pleasure and pain can, according to Aristotle's ethical works, help provide the habituation that is a necessary condition for the development of psychic excellence. It is, however, a mistake to identify psychic excellence with this kind of proportion.⁵⁷ Aristotle avoids making this identification when he writes, in *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.3 1104b8–9 "For ethical excellence is concerned with [περὶ] pleasures and pains." Aristotle's language in *Physics* 7.3 also reflects this conceptual distinction between physical and psychic excellence. He writes, "We set down [physical excellence] as consisting in [ἐν] a mixture and proportion of hot and cold" (246b5–6). He states, however, that ethical excellence is "concerned with [περὶ] bodily pleasures and pains" (247a7–8, cf. 247a15–16 περὶ ταύτας).

If, with the exception just noted, ethical excellence is analogous to physical excellence, psychic treatment is also analogous to medical treatment. Aristotle's ethical works frequently draw parallels between medical and psychic treatments. As Werner Jaeger has shown, these parallels have real philosophical significance "The medical example, far from being a casual analogy, is present to the philosopher's mind throughout. It belongs to the very foundation of his ethical science."⁵⁸ We are justified in drawing some substantive conclusions about ethics from what Aristotle says about medicine.

⁵⁷ On psychic excellence and habituation, see chap. 6.

⁵⁸ Jaeger, "Medicine," 56–57. See also Lloyd, "Analogies."

Of particular interest are a number of passages in which Aristotle calls punishment, the infliction of physical or emotional pain, a "medical treatment" for vice. The term for licentiousness, *akolasia*, means, literally, "unpunished," and Aristotle states that the *akolastos* is "someone who has not been punished [*kekolasmenos*] in some way, or medically treated [*λατρευμένος*]" (*EE* 1230a38–39). Aristotle rejected the idea, held by some people, that we should call *all* pleasure base in order to control the many. According to these people, "the many are inclined toward it [sc., pleasure], and are enslaved to pleasures, so that it is necessary to lead them to the opposite direction, for in this way they would arrive at the intermediate" (*EN* 1172a31–33). Nevertheless, Aristotle clearly believed in a more selective and judicial application of the principle of treatment by opposites. For example, at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b16–18, he writes that it is an indication that excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains that "punishments come by means of these [sc., deprivation of pleasures and infliction of pains]."⁵⁹ For they are medical treatments [*λατρεῖαι*] and medical treatments by nature take place by means of opposites." *Eudemian Ethics* 1220a34–37 expresses the same idea: "A sign that excellence and vice are concerned with pleasant and painful things is that punishments are medical treatments and come about by means of opposites, just as is true in other cases."

If psychic treatments are like allopathic medical treatments, we can infer that psychic katharsis, like physical katharsis, would use opposites to remove impediments to the completion and excellence of the soul, and thus help it realize its nature. A medical katharsis helps restore the excellence of the body that consists in a proportion of hot and cold, and it does so by using opposite to treat opposite. Similarly, an emotional katharsis could help restore the excellence of the soul by opposing (cold) pain to (hot) pleasure.⁶⁰ An allopathic theory of this kind, according to which emotional heat is opposed to cold fear, is implicit in *Problems* 954b14–15: "If it [sc., the melancholic temperament] is inclined to be hot, fear restores it to the measure, and [makes the person] self-possessed and unemotional."

An emotional katharsis, of course, could produce only "ethical excellence" (*Pby.* 247a7–8), and not the very different excellence of the intel-

⁵⁹ My explanation in the bracketed passages follows the interpretation of Gauthier and Jolif, ad loc.

⁶⁰ See chap. 6 ("Pity, Fear, and Physical Danger") for a discussion of Aristotle's view that pleasure is hot while pain is cold.

lectual part of the soul (247b1) ⁶¹ This kind of psychic katharsis could not, then, in itself produce the purity that is associated with contemplation, which is a "divine" rather than a human excellence, an ideal toward which we strive (*EN* 1177b26–1178a2). Ethical or "human excellences," those connected with the "compound" of body and soul (1178a20–21), can, however, help us develop the intellectual excellences. An emotional katharsis that helps us develop ethical excellence could, then, also help us strive toward divine purity of soul, to the extent of our ability. Thus, it is a reasonable inference that emotional katharsis, in Aristotle's view, is a process that strives toward, but never fully attains, the purity of soul that is the full completion and perfection of our nature as rational beings.

Politics 8

While Aristotle does not specifically mention a katharsis of the soul in the ethical works or in the *Physics*, in *Politics* 8 he gives a detailed account of a psychic katharsis produced by "enthusiastic" music:

For an emotion that occurs strongly in some souls exists in all of them, but differs in being less or more [intense], for example pity and fear, and again enthusiasm. For some people are inclined to be possessed by this motion, but we see them, when they make use of tunes that put the soul into a state of religious excitement, restored by the sacred tunes as though they had received medical treatment and katharsis. This same experience necessarily happens to people who are inclined to pity or fear, and to those who are in general inclined to be emotional, and to others, to the extent that a share of these kinds of things falls to each person, and all get a certain katharsis and relief with pleasure. Similarly, kathartic tunes give harmless pleasure to people (1342a4–16).

Because katharsis is not a simple drainage in this passage, but involves an interaction between emotion and music, we may ask whether it can be characterized as homeopathic or allopathic. Most scholars assume that the homeopathic interpretation is correct. For example, although Carnes Lord notes that the psychic katharsis of *Politics* 8 is "in some sense a medical cure," and that "it is more than doubtful whether catharsis in the medical sense is homoeopathic," he nevertheless writes "The catharsis of which

⁶¹ The distinction between ethical and intellectual excellence is also made in the ethical works. See, for example, *EN* 1103a3–10, where Aristotle writes that the intellectual excellences include wisdom, understanding, and practical reason, while the ethical excellences include liberality and *sōphrosunē*.

Aristotle speaks is manifestly a homeopathic cure."⁶² In this katharsis, according to Lord, "enthusiastic music . . . effects a catharsis of enthusiasm," for the "sacred tunes" mentioned here are to be identified with the tunes of Olympos that are said to "make souls enthusiastic" in *Politics* 1340a9–11, or with Phrygian enthusiastic music (1340b4–5).⁶³ Viewed in this way, katharsis is a process in which motion cures motion homeopathically. The people who are "possessed" suffer from a strong internal (e)motion that is cured by an external motion: music (and, we may assume, dance) that moves the soul as well as the body: the tunes "put the soul into a state of religious excitement" (ἐξοργάζουσι τὴν ψυχὴν).

The homeopathic interpretation of *Politics* 1342a, however, faces a number of difficulties. The medical analogy tells against it. Again, as Lord himself points out, the tunes that make normal people enthusiastic do not effect a katharsis of enthusiasm in them (*Education*, 127). This means that the enthusiasm produced by the tunes is not the same as the enthusiasm cured by them. The process is not so "manifestly" homeopathic as Lord believes. Moreover, attempts to find a source for Aristotelian katharsis in a homeopathic musical katharsis have not been successful.

Another objection to the homeopathic interpretation is that there is no clear evidence that cures produced by the "religious excitement" to which Aristotle refers were commonly thought to be homeopathic.⁶⁴ In nonphilosophical literature, enthusiastic religious rites are not usually said to work either by similars or by opposites. For example, in Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysus, the god of wine, is simply "a medicine for labor" (283), in whose "holy purification rites" (77) his followers participate. In this play, our best single source of information about enthusiastic Bacchic rites, there is no suggestion of a specifically homeopathic or allopathic process. Again, in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (115–24), Bdelycleon makes various attempts to cure his father of madness, including katharsis and the use of the Corybantic rites. As Kenneth Reckford notes, however, the precise nature of these different curative processes is not specified. Instead, the cures "shade off into each other; they share various elements of purifi-

⁶² Carnes Lord, *Education*, 122. Other recent scholars who hold a homeopathic view of this passage are Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 192, and Janko, *Poetics I*, xix.

⁶³ Lord, *Education*, 127.

⁶⁴ Lord, who argues for a religious origin of homeopathic katharsis, notes some of the difficulties for this view *ibid.*, 124–26. I argued in chap. 8 ("Homeopathy: The Ancient Evidence") that one kind of religious katharsis, the use of blood to cleanse blood, is a poor source for Aristotelian tragic katharsis.

cation, purgation, and emotional release; and they belong together as 'therapy' and 'catharsis.'"⁶⁵

Nor do philosophical texts dealing with religious enthusiasm provide clear evidence for homeopathic enthusiastic rites. In *Laws* 7.790–91, for example, Plato gives a detailed account of "the curative processes of the wild Bacchic rites" (790e2–3)⁶⁶ used to treat people who suffer from a mad terror:

These emotions are fear, and fears result from a bad disposition of the soul. But when someone applies a shaking from outside to these kinds of emotions, the motion applied from outside masters the internal fearful and mad motion. When it has mastered, having made a peaceful calm appear in the hard pounding of the heart of each person, something that is entirely desirable, [then, when we are] made to dance and play the flute with the gods to whom each person sacrifices with good omens, it makes us have sane dispositions instead of mad. (*Laws* 7.790e8–791b1)

Scholars have held various and often confusing views about the nature of the process described by Plato. Georg Finsler characterizes these Corybantic cures as homeopathic, finding the homeopathic principle in the application of external motion to internal motion.⁶⁷ Carl Müller, on the other hand, believes that Plato's account is based on the principle of allopathy: "agitation [is cured] by means of a (counter) motion," and "the motions . . . are opposites of one another."⁶⁸ Ivan Linforth's views are less clear. He appears to hold a homeopathic view when he writes, "The cure is homeopathic in that it produces symptoms identical or nearly identical with those of the disorder to be cured."⁶⁹ However, Linforth appears to acknowledge that the cures also have allopathic aspects when he writes that "the inner tumult is cured by outer activity; unwholesome mania is driven out by beneficent mania; and in the end both kinds of mania are gone. We should not overlook that the mania which was cured is not said to have been produced by Corybantic possession" ("Rites," 134). Linforth, moreover, argues against Rohde's "theory . . . that the Corybantic disease was cured homeopathically by the Corybantic rites," and concludes that "there is no instance on record in which any kind of disorder whatsoever that was

⁶⁵ Reckford, "Catharsis," 284.

⁶⁶ Linforth's translation in "Rites," 132, reading *oi*.

⁶⁷ Finsler, *Platon*, 113: "The shaking applied from without has a homeopathic character."

⁶⁸ Müller, *Gleicher*, 145 n. 127.

⁶⁹ Linforth, "Rites," 158.

produced by the Corybantes was cured by their rites."⁷⁰ Evanhélos Moutsopoulos's statements are also somewhat confusing. He holds an allopathic view of *Laws* 790–91,⁷¹ yet he admits that the rites have homeopathic aspects when he states that "this therapeutic method reach[es] the limits of a homeopathic treatment" (*Musique*, 108 n. 2).

This confusion in the literature is understandable. In Plato's Corybantic rites, ordered movement imposes order on disordered movement.⁷² Thus, the rites should be classified as homeopathic if the essential idea is that movement acts on movement, but as allopathic if order is thought to act on disorder. In this passage, unfortunately, Plato does not explicitly state whether the rites work by means of similars or by means of opposites.

Plato's use of medical terminology and concepts in *Laws* 7.790–91, however, provides some evidence for the allopathic view. The medical theory of the *Laws* is an allopathic one, based on the concept of *isonomia* (equilibrium) of opposing powers. The rites of *Laws* 7 are analogous to (or, more properly, an integral part of) a medical treatment in which motion is used to produce excellence of both soul and body (790c–d). The rites are said to be "medical treatments" (ἰάσεις: 790e3, ἰάματα: 790d4), in which someone "applies" (προσφέρειν: 791a1, 791a2) an external "motion" to a preexisting internal "mad motion" (κίνησις: 791a2, 791a3). The external motion "masters" (κρατεῖ: 791a2) the internal motion.⁷³ The term "masters" has a technical, medical sense earlier in *Laws* 7, where Plato advocates the use of continual motion to produce health, beauty, and strength in young children, and as an aid to the "mastery" (digestion) of food (κατακρατοῦντα: 789d5–6).

The allopathic interpretation of *Laws* 7 makes sense for other reasons also. On this view, the Corybantic rites cure by applying a "drug" of orderly, rhythmic motion that "masters" preexisting disorderly motion. When the orderly motion has "mastered" and produced peace in the soul, the sufferer participates in the rhythmical motion of the cure by dancing

⁷⁰ Ibid., 151. His reference (cited on 146) is to E. Rohde, *Psyche*, 9th and 10th eds., 2:47ff.

⁷¹ Moutsopoulos, *Musique*, 109 and 106 n. 1.

⁷² This essential feature of Plato's account is brought out by Boyancé, *Culte*, 198, and Moulinier, *Par*, 418.

⁷³ That these terms belong to medical vocabulary is shown by LSJ and by Maloney and Frohn, *Concordance*. See, on προσφέρειν, LSJ, s.v. προσφέρω, 3.b: "esp. of food, drink, or medicine"; Maloney and Frohn list 208 occurrences of the lemma προσφέρω. For κίνησις, see LSJ, s.v. κινέω, A.II.3, which lists a medical sense; Maloney and Frohn list 197 occurrences of the lemma κινέω and 58 of κίνησις. On κρατεῖ, see LSJ, s.v. κρατέω, 3.b: "of food, digest, assimilate"; Maloney and Frohn list 145 occurrences of the lemma κρατέω.

along with the flute music. Thus, musical motion cures because it is itself, and produces in the sufferer, motion that is completely different from the motion that characterizes the disease. This view of music and dance in *Laws* 790–91 is supported by Plato's theory in *Laws* 2 that music and dance originated in the imposition of orderly motion (rhythm and harmony) on disorderly cries and leaps, such as those made by young children (653d7–654a5, 672b–d).⁷⁴

Aristotle's use of medical terms in *Politics* 1342a suggests that he, like Plato, thinks that enthusiastic rites are analogous to a medical treatment by means of opposites. Aristotle compares music to medicine when he writes that sufferers are "restored by the sacred tunes as though they had received medical treatment and katharsis" (καθισταμένους ὡσπερ ἰατρείας τυχόντας καὶ καθάρσεως: 1342a10–11). As Newman points out, "and" (καί) in this phrase is explanatory.⁷⁵ That is, the medical treatment *is* a katharsis, and the effect of the "sacred tunes" on the soul is like (ὡσπερ) this medical katharsis. This analogy is significant, for in other passages Aristotle compares a treatment of the soul to a medical treatment, and states that medical treatments work by means of opposites (*EN* 1104b16–18, *EE* 1220a34–37). Earlier in *Politics* 8 itself, Aristotle makes a similar comparison, writing that "relaxation is necessarily pleasant, for it is a medical treatment [ἰατρεία] for the pain that comes from labor" (1339b16–17).⁷⁶ Aristotle's use of a number of other medical terms in *Politics* 8.1342a4–16 reinforces the explicit medical analogy: χρῆσονται (make use of: 1342a10), κινήσεως (motion: 1342a8), καθισταμένους (restore: 1342a10), and κουφίζεσθαι (relief: 1342a14).⁷⁷

⁷⁴ See chap. 1 ("A Medicine to Produce *Asidōs*"). In *Tim.* 88c–e also, regular motion gives order to disordered motion. Moutsopoulos, *Musique*, 98–111, calls attention to the remarkable parallels between this passage and *Laws* 790–91, noting that both describe an allopathic process.

⁷⁵ Newman, *Politics* 3.564.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, on 1339b15, notes that this passage alludes to the principle of treatment by opposites.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, on 1342a8, notes that Susemihl calls attention to these medical terms, see Susemihl and Hicks, *Politics*, on 1342a9, 1342a10, 1342a14, and 641 n. 2, who attribute (641) the observation about medical terminology to Döring, *Aristotelische Kunsttheorie*, 319ff. Information in LSJ and in Maloney and Frohn, *Concordance*, confirms the view that these terms belong to medical vocabulary. On χρῆσονται, see Maloney and Frohn, who list 677 occurrences under the lemma χρῶν. For κινήσεως, see above, n. 73. On καθισταμένους, see LSJ, s.v. καθίστημι, A 1.2 "restore the general health" (Hippocrates, *Mul.* 2.133); B.5: "recover" (Hippocrates, *Coac.* 160), Maloney and Frohn list 189 occurrences under the lemma καθίστημι. On κουφίζεσθαι, see LSJ, s.v. κουφίζω, 2.b: Euripides, *Orestes* 43. "when the body is relieved [κουφίσθη] from sickness", Maloney and Frohn list

The term καθίστημι (restore 1342a10) is of particular interest because of its association in other passages with emotional states intermediate between extremes. At *Politics* 1340b3, Aristotle uses the cognate adverb when he says that people listen to Dorian tunes μέσως καὶ καθεσθηκώτως. "in a midway state of collectedness and composure."⁷⁸ The effect of Dorian tunes is "midway" between that of Mixolydian tunes, to which people listen in a "mournful and contracted [συνεσθηκώτως]" state, and that of other tunes that are "relaxed" (ἀνεμμένος). 1340a42–b3 Contraction and relaxation are associated with the emotional opposites grief and joy, which are produced by these tunes.⁷⁹ Again, at 1342b14–16, Dorian harmony is said to be intermediate between extremes. The verb καθίστημι (restore) is also associated with an emotional intermediate state in two other passages, where it refers specifically to a process effected by means of opposites. At *Eudemian Ethics* 1239b33–36, Aristotle writes: "For the opposites do not desire one another, but the intermediate. For being excessively cold, if they are heated, they are restored [καθίστανται] to the intermediate, and being excessively hot, [they are restored] if they are cooled." After this passage, Aristotle compares the friendship of people with unlike emotional qualities to the "desire" of these physical extremes for one another. In both cases, opposite "restores" opposite to an intermediate state.⁸⁰ The verb καθίστημι (restore) is also associated with physical and emotional temperature at *Problems* 954b14–15. "If it [sc., the melancholic temperament] is inclined to be hot, fear restores [κατέστησεν] it to the measure, and [makes the person] self-possessed and unemotional." Taken together, all of these uses of καθίστημι (restore) suggest that, in *Politics* 1342a10 also, this term might be used to refer to a state between two opposites, produced by means of allopathic treatment.

While Aristotle's medical analogy and his use of medical terminology give us good reason to favor an allopathic interpretation of *Politics* 8.1342a, Aristotle does not give us any detailed information about the

31 occurrences under the lemma κομφίζω. For the association of katharsis and "relief," see "Aristotle," *Prob* 880a33 "Of necessity, these people often wish to experience a katharsis [ἀποκαθαίρεσθαι], for [then] they are relieved [κομφίζονται]" (cited by Bonitz, s v κομφίζειν)

⁷⁸ This is Newman's translation, *Politics*, ad loc , where he compares Aristotle's use of the verb at *Pol* 1342a10 and at *EE* 1239b35

⁷⁹ See Newman, *Politics*, on 1340a42, and compare *Prob* 11 13, where laughter, relaxation, hot breath, and high-pitched sounds are all associated with one another, while weeping, tension, cold breath, and low-pitched sounds are also closely associated

⁸⁰ This passage is discussed in chap. 6 ("Aidō, Excellence, and Habituation")

specific nature of the kathartic process in question. It is possible that he believed, like Plato in the *Laws*, that musical treatment cures strong, internal, disordered, and abnormal (e)motion by means of an opposite external, orderly motion: music and dance. On the other hand, Aristotle may have had in mind some other cure that was traditionally thought to be effected by musical modes and harmonies. Aristides, according to Carnes Lord, held that music can effect "a 'therapeutic' education operating 'by way of opposition' (*kat' enantiosēta*) on those who suffer from an excess of passion."⁸¹ Aristotle's failure to explain katharsis, however, and our imperfect knowledge of Greek musical theory make it difficult to draw definite conclusions.⁸²

If *Politics* 8 is of interest because it discusses a treatment of the soul analogous to a medical katharsis, in other respects it is of very limited usefulness for an understanding of katharsis in the *Poetics*.⁸³ *Politics* 8 is concerned with a musical treatment, while tragic katharsis is produced by the plot and not by music, which is merely a "sweetener" (*Po.* 1449b28–29, 1450b16). Moreover, in the *Politics* Aristotle is concerned with abnormal people who experience emotional states more "strongly" than others (1342a5–6). The statement that "an emotion that occurs strongly in some souls exists in all of them" does not imply that all people could benefit from the treatment that is useful for these abnormal cases. Nor, when Aristotle says that "all" (πάντοι: 1342a14) get a certain katharsis, is he referring to all people: he is only concerned with all those who are inclined to be abnormally emotional (παθητικώς: 1342a12–13).⁸⁴ In the *Poetics*, on the other hand, Aristotle is concerned with a normal audience, as is shown by his defense of the superiority of tragedy in chapter 26, and by the complete absence of any suggestion, in the *Poetics*, that the audience is diseased or abnormal. Finally, in the *Politics*, the kathartic use of music is contrasted with an educational use of music (1341b32–1342a4; cf. 1341a23–24), while in *Poetics* 4 imitation is said to be pleasurable because we learn from it.

⁸¹ Carnes Lord, *Education*, 205, summarizing Aristides Quintilianus, *De musica* 2.9 (68.22–69.1 Winnington-Ingram).

⁸² On Greek musical theory and Aristotle, see Lord, *Education*, appendix, 203–19. A good sourcebook, with commentary, is A. Barker, *Greek Musical Writings*.

⁸³ Some differences between the two works are noted by Lord, *Education*, 126–38, and Golden, "Purgation."

⁸⁴ Lord, *Education*, 130–34, argues that there are two kinds of katharsis in question: one for abnormal and one for normal people. This interpretation does not appear to me to be supported by the text.

Iron and Wood

In addition to making frequent use of medical analogies, Aristotle sometimes compares ethical treatments to two physical processes that are effected by means of opposites: that of straightening warped wood, and that of tempering iron. These two analogies, especially when the broader Aristotelian and Greek philosophical contexts are taken into account, provide further evidence that Aristotle believed that psychic treatment, like medical treatment, works by means of opposites.

The analogy of straightening warped wood occurs first in Plato's *Protagoras* (325d5–7). If the young do not obey persuasion, Plato writes, people correct them with punishments: "They straighten them with threats and blows, like wood that is warped [διαστρεφόμενον] and bent." While Plato does not call this treatment a katharsis in the *Protagoras*, he does call punishment a katharsis in the *Laws*. Here, in writing about "purifications" (*katharmoi*: e.g., 735d1), Plato compares punishment to a medical katharsis: "The best [purification] is painful, just like that [effected by] drugs of this kind: that which brings to punishment by means of justice and retribution" (735d8–e2). And in *Laws* 1, restoration of psychic health is compared to a medical katharsis (628c9–e1).

Aristotle himself uses the warped-wood analogy in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1109a30–b26. In order to attain the praiseworthy intermediate in ethical matters, he writes, it is "necessary to incline at one time to the excess and at another to the deficiency" (1109b24–25). This is because human nature often tends toward one of the vicious extremes, and "it is necessary to drag ourselves in the opposite direction; for by drawing ourselves far away from error, we will arrive at the intermediate, just as those do who straighten warped wood" (1109b4–7). We humans, Aristotle believes, are naturally inclined toward pleasures, and so are likely to be licentious (1109a14–16). He means, for example, that we naturally tend toward gluttony and drunkenness. To correct this tendency so as to arrive at the intermediate state of *sōphrosunē*, we must, according to Aristotle, bend over backward in the direction of deficiency, toward sobriety and fasting. In straightening warped wood, just as in allopathic medical treatments, an opposing extreme is applied so as to bring a preexisting undesirable extreme to an intermediate state. The wood that people straighten by bending it in the opposite direction needs this treatment because it has been warped (διαστραμμένα: EN 1109b6) out of its natural, straight position. Similarly, the soul is "warped" by vice: "For vice warps [διαστρέφει] and makes a

person mistaken about the practical first principles" (EN 1144a34–36). A treatment by opposites that helps restore the soul to a natural, excellent state, then, is analogous to this process of straightening warped wood.

Aristotle himself does not use the term "katharsis" in connection with the warped-wood analogy. However, Olympiodorus's use of this analogy in characterizing an "Aristotelian katharsis" provides evidence that Aristotle was associated in antiquity with an allopathic psychic katharsis.⁸⁵ Olympiodorus contrasts an allopathic "Aristotelian" or "Stoic" katharsis that "cures evil with evil" with a "Socratic," homeopathic katharsis that "derives similars from similars," and with a "Pythagorean," evacuative katharsis.⁸⁶ He writes that in the "Aristotelian" katharsis "evil cures evil, and by the combat of opposites [τῆ διαμάχη τῶν ἐναντίων] brings it to a proportion [*summetria*]" (*Alcibiades* 146.3). Olympiodorus also discusses this "Aristotelian" or "Stoic" katharsis earlier in the same work.

[Katharsis] cures opposites by means of opposites, applying the appetite to the spirit [*thumos*] and thus softening it, and [applying] the spirit to the appetite,⁸⁷ and thus strengthening it and training it to be more manly, like crooked twigs that people bend in the opposite direction when they wish to straighten them, so as to produce a proportion [*summetron*] by carrying them over to the opposite side. Similarly, they practice the art of producing harmony in the soul by this kind of method (*Alcibiades* 54 18–55 1).

Olympiodorus's language—"the combat of opposites," "cures opposites by means of opposites"—and his crooked-twig analogy leave no doubt that the katharsis he describes is allopathic, effected by means of opposites. This same language also suggests a genuine Aristotelian source. Olympiodorus's statement "like crooked twigs that people bend in the opposite direction when they wish to straighten them [δίχην τῶν κακαμμένων ῥάβδων ὡς οἱ θέλοντες εὐθῦναι πρὸς τὸ ἐναντίον περιλυγίζουσιν]" recalls Aristotle's language in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1109b4–7: "It is necessary to drag ourselves in the opposite direction [εἰς τοῦναντίον δ' ἑαυτοῦς ἀφέλκειν δεῖ], for by drawing ourselves far away from error, we will arrive

⁸⁵ Ničev (*Catharsis*, 183–92, and "Olympiodore") and Janko (*Comedy*, 147) both fail to note that Olympiodorus's warped-wood analogy occurs in Aristotle's own work. Both also fail to see, as noted in chap. 8 ("The Homeopathic Prejudice") that Olympiodorus's "Aristotelian" katharsis is allopathic.

⁸⁶ Olympiodorus, *Alcibiades* 54 15–55 14, cf. 145 12–146 11. The allopathic katharsis, called "Aristotelian" at 146 3, is clearly the same as the Stoic katharsis mentioned at 54 18, as Ničev points out (*Catharsis*, 184). On these kinds of katharsis, see also chap. 8 ("Homeopathy: The Ancient Evidence").

⁸⁷ At 54 19 I read τῆ δὲ ἐπιθυμίᾳ τὸν θυμὸν, suggested by Westerink, *Olympiodorus*

at the intermediate, just as those do who straighten warped wood [διεστραμμένα τῶν ξύλων ὀρθοῦντες ποιούσιν]” Moreover, the idea of opposites curing opposites is frequently expressed in Aristotle's works, as I have shown above.

Aristotle also compares ethical training to the tempering of iron. In *Politics* 7, Aristotle writes that, for military states, peace can be more dangerous than war.

Most such [warlike] states are preserved when at war, but are destroyed when they have acquired an empire. For they lose their tempering [βαφήν], like iron, when at peace. The lawgiver is to blame for not educating them to be able to be at leisure. War compels people to be just and temperate, but the enjoyment of good fortune, and being at leisure in peacetime make them more inclined to be hubristic. (*Pol.* 1334a6–10, 25–28)

The analogy in this passage is derived from the technique of strengthening (tempering) iron.⁸⁸ In the ancient process of ironworking, iron ore was first heated to remove impurities and make the metal soft enough to be shaped. The hot iron was forged, and then dipped into cold water in a process called “quenching” (βαφή) to harden it—hence the term Aristotle uses in *Politics* 7 for the result of the whole “tempering” process.⁸⁹ Thus, the successive application of the opposites hot and cold produces a useful tool. As Aristotle succinctly puts it in *Generation of Animals* 734b37–735a1, “the hot and the cold make the iron hard and soft.” The iron-tempering process is allopathic in that it is effected by means of opposites.

While Aristotle does not give details about the analogous process of tempering the soul in *Politics* 7 1334a, a passage in *Politics* 5 suggests that this process might be effected by opposing (cold) pain and fear to (hot) shameless and hubristic tendencies. While in war fear is naturally present, in peace, Aristotle writes, a beneficial fear would have to be artificially supplied.

Constitutions are preserved not only because destroyers are far off, but sometimes also because they are near. For when they are afraid, people keep the constitution more under control. So that it is necessary for those concerned about the constitution to provide fears, and to make what is far off [seem]

⁸⁸ I use the term “tempering” loosely, to refer to the process of strengthening iron by means of heating and quenching. Technically, “tempering” iron is an entirely different process. On ancient techniques of ironworking, see Lee, *Meteorologica*, 324–29, and Forbes, *Studies*, 196–210.

⁸⁹ Newman, *Politics*, on 1334a8, notes that βαφή has this meaning here.

near, so that [the people] might keep guard and not, like a night watch, neglect their guard over the constitution. (*Pol.* 1308a24–30)

Thucydides' Pericles used fear in just the way Aristotle recommends: "When he had any perception that the people were inappropriately hubristic and bold, by speaking he struck them with terror [κατέπλησεν] to make them fear" (2.65.9).

The iron-tempering analogy of Aristotle's *Politics* also occurs in Plato, as does the warped-wood analogy. Within the context of this Platonic background, the significance of Aristotle's brief allusion to tempering in *Politics* 7 can better be appreciated.

In *Republic* 3.410c–412a, Plato advocates a correct mixture of music and gymnastics in education. This mixture, he believes, is necessary to "harmonize" the spirited and rational parts of the soul with each other by properly tensing and relaxing them (411e4–412a2). Music at first softens the spirited part of the soul "just like iron," and "makes it useful instead of useless and hard." Excessive indulgence in music, however, makes it "melt and liquefy" (411a10–b2). On the other hand, too much physical training produces too much "hardness" of soul (410d1). While the primary analogy in this passage is that of musical harmony, Plato is also comparing psychic training to the process of tempering iron by alternately softening it in fire and hardening it in cold water. Physical training is like cold water, and musical education is like fire. In the *Laws*, as we have seen, Plato uses the iron-tempering analogy in his account of the process by means of which the souls of old people are softened and made more "shameless" by wine. Dionysus, Plato writes, provides "the initiation rite and play of the old, which he gave to human beings in the form of wine,⁹⁰ a medicine as a remedy for the austerity of old age, so that we might become young again, and so that through forgetfulness of despondency the hard character of our soul might become softer, like iron put into fire, and so made more easy to mold" (*Laws* 2.666b4–c2). The same analogy recurs in *Laws* 2.671b8–10, where Plato writes that the souls of the wine drinkers "like iron" become "fiery" and "softer"—that is, like iron that has been heated in fire as part of the tempering process.

It is possible that the iron-tempering analogy originated with Socrates. At least, it is associated with him in Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades* (6.4): "Just as iron softened in fire is contracted again by the cold, and its parts are drawn together, so Socrates, whenever he found Alcibiades full of softness and empty conceit, made him humble and bashful by pressing and reducing him with speech." Here, as in *Laws* 2, the "fire" that softens the

⁹⁰ Reading τὸν οἶνον at 666b6, with Burnet, *Platonis opera*.

soul is associated with shamelessness, and excess is corrected by means of the opposite extreme.⁹¹

The old people of Plato's *Laws*, who are too cold and timid, are unlike the people in Aristotle's *Politics* 7, who have lost their "tempering" and become hubristic. Nevertheless, the principle of treatment would be the same in both cases: excessive psychic heat or cold can be corrected by the application of the opposite extreme. The iron-tempering analogy is apt in both cases because this process involves both heating and chilling. Although Aristotle does not call this psychic tempering a katharsis, Plato calls wine, which softens and heats the soul, "a drug for the attainment of *aidōs* in the soul" (672d7-8), and he clearly believes that its effect is analogous to that of the medical katharsis mentioned in *Laws* 1 628d2.

Aristotle's warped-wood and iron-tempering analogies, then, provide further circumstantial evidence that Aristotelian psychic katharsis resembles allopathic medical katharsis. The analogies themselves are based on allopathic principles. Moreover, Olympiodorus uses the warped-wood analogy in writing about a process he calls "Aristotelian katharsis," and Plato uses the iron-tempering analogy in discussing an allopathic psychic treatment that resembles a medical katharsis. This gives us reason to place Aristotle's analogies in the broader context of a philosophical tradition that generally accepted katharsis by means of opposites. If Aristotle himself generally avoids the term "katharsis" in discussing psychic treatments, this may be because the expression "katharsis of the soul" had acquired too many Platonic, Pythagorean, and Orphic connotations. In the *Phaedo*, for example, psychic katharsis is a process of separation of the soul from the body.⁹² Aristotle, however, believes that a treatment of the soul must take into account the appetites and desires, pleasures and pains of the body; it cannot simply eliminate these physical elements. It is perhaps significant that in the *Laws*, a late dialogue with a radically different psychology from that of the *Phaedo*, Plato generally avoids the term "katharsis," even though he makes it clear that the psychic treatment he describes is analogous to a medical katharsis.

The Platonic Elenchus

In the *Sophist*, Plato uses the term "katharsis" to refer to a specific psychic treatment. At *Sophist* 230d7-8, the elenchus is said to be "the greatest and

⁹¹ For other metaphorical uses of the iron-tempering process in Plutarch, see two of the passages listed by Lee, *Meteorologica*, 327-28; *Moralia* 73c-d and 943e.

⁹² See especially *Phaedo* 66d8-67b2, where "katharsis" and its cognates occur five times.

most powerful katharsis" for the soul, because psychic katharsis removes from the soul the opinions that impede learning, just as a medical katharsis removes from the body impediments to health (230c3–d4). This psychic katharsis is of particular interest because it does not necessitate the complete separation of the soul from the body, but takes into account the emotional as well as the intellectual aspects of the human personality.⁹³

As I argued in chapter 6 ("Kataplēxis and Ekplēxis"), Socrates often produces shame in his interlocutors. In *Sophist* 230b–d, Plato discusses in detail the kathartic process that uses shame as a psychic drug. Socrates says of the practitioners of the elenchus

They ask questions concerning those things about which people think they have something to say, while actually saying nothing. Then, since people wander [in their views], they easily examine their opinions, and gathering together these opinions in their arguments, they put them in the same place beside each other, and putting them there, they show that these opinions are opposite to one another at the same time, concerning the same things, in relation to the same things, and with respect to the same things. And seeing this, the others [sc., the people examined] are angry with themselves and mild toward others, and in this way, they are freed from conceited and stubborn opinions about themselves,⁹⁴ the most pleasant of all releases for the audience, and the most lasting for the patient. For, dear child, just as doctors of the body believe that the body cannot benefit from the nourishment applied to it before one casts out the impediments within, so those purifying [katharontes] these people believe the same thing about the soul: that it will not get any benefit from the learning applied to it before someone by cross-examining brings the person examined to shame [aischunē], and taking away the opinions that impede learning, makes him pure [katharon], thinking that he knows only those things that he does know, but not more. (*Soph* 230b4–d4)

The psychic katharsis produced by the elenchus is much like the physical katharsis produced by drugs in *Problems* 1.42. A medical analogy is fundamental to Plato's account. The practitioners of the elenchus are compared to "doctors of the body," and the elenchus, which removes impeding opinions (230d2), is compared to a medical katharsis, which casts out

⁹³ Scholars usually stress the intellectual effects of the elenchus. See, for example, Vlastos, "Elenchus" and "Afterthoughts," and Krauc, "Comments." However, the elenchus also has important emotional effects, as is noted by Gooch, "Vice." See also Belfiore, "Elenchus."

⁹⁴ On the meaning of περὶ αὐτοῦς (230c1), see Kerford, "Sophistry," 88 n. 3, who calls attention to R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2d ed., 12.

physical impediments (230c6–7). The “application” of learning is compared to the “application” (προσφερομένης, 230c5, 230c8 [a medical term])⁹⁵ of food. However, because the soul is more complex than the body, the administration of the drug that induces katharsis is also a more complex process than is the administration of a physical drug.

The first step in psychic treatment is a diagnosis designed to bring patients to understand what their own opinions are. They have, in the first place, opinions obstructive to learning and as harmful to the excellence of the soul as disease-causing elements in the body are harmful to physical excellence. These opinions, as is clear from Plato's accounts of the elenchus in other dialogues, make a person shameless: ready to do and say anything about anything, because of the belief that one knows what one does not know. These false opinions are inconsistent with one another and with more modest, true beliefs the patients must also have if they are capable of shame and curable. In the *Gorgias*, for example, Polus makes the shameless statement that it is worse to suffer injustice than to do it. He also agrees with Socrates, however, that it is more shameful to do injustice than to suffer it (474c–d). These two opinions, as Callicles points out (482c–483a), are inconsistent and lead to Polus's refutation by Socrates.

Diagnosis in the elenchus has two stages. In the first stage (*Soph.* 230b4–5), the doctors of the soul bring the impeding opinions to light by asking questions designed to reveal the false, shameless beliefs that will later be removed, and the true opinions with which they are inconsistent. For example, in answer to Socrates' opening question, “What do you say excellence is?” (*Meno* 71d5), Meno makes a speech in which he shamelessly asserts what he thinks he knows, but does not really know, about excellence (71e1–72a5). On this occasion, as on others, Meno was accustomed “to say very many words about excellence on many occasions, and before many people” (80b2–3). He was, like the shameless person of the *Magna moralia*, someone “who on all occasions and to everyone, says and does whatever occurs to him” (1193a2–4). This bringing to light of shamelessness is an essential preliminary to the Platonic katharsis of the soul. It should not, however, be confused with the kathartic process itself. Shamelessness does not cast out shamelessness, any more than the impediments in the body that are discovered in a medical diagnosis cast themselves out. After the false, shameless opinions have been brought to light, together with true, more modest opinions, the second stage of the diagnosis takes place. At this point, the doctors gather together all of the beliefs that have been brought to light and show that they are inconsistent (*Soph.* 230b5–8).

⁹⁵ See above, n. 73.

The next step in psychic treatment is the production of shame (230b8–d2). This comes about as a natural result of the publicly conducted cross-examination: "And seeing this [they] are angry with themselves" (230b8–9); "by cross-examining [the doctor] brings the person examined to shame" (230d1–2). The use of shame to oppose shamelessness is like the use of a drug to counter disease-causing material that has the opposite qualities. In other Platonic dialogues, the "patient" experiences shame so intense that he is, for the moment, paralyzed and speechless, like the *kataplēx* in the *Magna moralia*, "who is cautious about doing and saying everything and to everyone. This kind of person does not act at all, the person who is *kataplēx* in every way" (1193a4–6). For example, when Alcibiades is afraid of growing old while sitting and listening to Socrates (*Sym.* 216a8), his paralysis is closely connected with *ekplēxis* (215d5) and shame. Alcibiades says, "Before him alone of all people, I experienced something that no one would have thought I had in me: shame before anyone at all" (*Sym.* 216a8–b2). Meno states that Socrates has paralyzed him like a stingray, so he is unable to say anything (*Meno* 80b4).⁹⁶ It is this emotional shock of anger with oneself and shame before others that has the effect of a drug. While the intellectual knowledge that one's beliefs are inconsistent is necessary to produce katharsis in those who require the elenchus, it is not in itself sufficient, for the more shameless one is, the less likely one is to be troubled by any such inconsistency. Only shame, a public humiliation of the kind Socrates administers, can counteract the shameless tendencies that make one believe, and confidently assert, that one knows what one does not know.

Shame, like a drug, produces katharsis (230d2–4). In this process, the extreme shame produced by the elenchus departs, together with the extreme preexisting shamelessness it has counterbalanced. This is exactly what happens in the case of drugs, in the account of *Problems* 864a32–34: "Not being concocted but mastering, they depart, carrying impediments with them. This is called katharsis." In the psychic katharsis of the *Sophist*, false, shameless opinions are carried off. As the opposing extreme of shame departs from the soul, one is also freed from the effects produced, temporarily, by the elenchus itself: excessive shame that leads one to believe that one knows nothing at all. The result, at least in theory, is a pure (*katharon*:

⁹⁶ As these parallels show, the *aischunē* mentioned at *Soph.* 230d1 is not, as Gooch writes, "the resulting emotional state" of "modesty" ("Vice," 130), but excessive shame, a counterweight to preexisting shamelessness; the resulting state is *sōphrosunē* (230d5). The effects of the elenchus are also described at *Gorgias* 482e1–2 (binding and gagging, as well as shame); *Laches* 194b1–4 (inability to speak); *Rep.* 350d3 (blushing); and *Rep.* 358b3 (being charmed as if by a snake).

230d3) state of soul, *sōphrosunē* (230d5), in which one thinks one knows only those things one really knows (230d3–4). The person in this state is like the *aidēmōn* of the *Magna moralia*, who “will do and say the right things, on the right occasions and at the right times” (1193a10).

In sum, the elenchus opposes emotion (shame) to emotion (shamelessness), as well as opinion (that one knows nothing) to opinion (that one knows things one does not know). It thus produces an emotional mean state, as well as intellectual purity. Only after attaining this state can a person learn and benefit from teaching. This kathartic process is allopathic in that it is effected by means of opposites. In outline form, the several steps involved in the psychic katharsis of Plato's *Sophist* are the following:

I. Diagnosis

A. Bringing to light of false, shameless opinions (those based on a belief that one knows what one does not know) and of true, more modest opinions

B. Gathering all these opinions together and showing that they are inconsistent

II. Production of shame, which acts as a drug

III. Katharsis: removal of shameless opinions, which are carried off as the opposing extreme of shame departs from the soul

IV. *Sōphrosunē*: a pure, healthy state of the soul, in which one believes that one knows only what one does know

The detailed account of katharsis in the *Sophist* is completely consistent with what little information we have about Aristotelian psychic katharsis, and with what we know about his views on physical katharsis. Plato, moreover, gives us valuable information not available in Aristotle about how a psychic katharsis can affect beliefs. This information is particularly useful because we would expect Aristotelian tragic katharsis to involve the cognitive as well as the physical aspects of the emotions. In tragedy, as in the elenchus, both beliefs and emotions are important. In viewing an imitation, we “put things together,” or “reason” (*sullogizesthai*: *Po.* 4.1448b16). Moreover, in viewing tragedy, as in undergoing the elenchus, we experience *ekplexis* in response to events that are shameful. Finally, like the elenchus, tragedy brings to light our shameless tendencies, for we enjoy tragedy in part because, at some level, we like hearing about parricide, incest, and other shameless deeds.

In chapter 9 I have examined much material, in Aristotle and in other ancient writers, relevant to an understanding of Aristotelian katharsis. All this material taken collectively allows us to draw some plausible infer-

ences. First, when Aristotelian physical katharsis is an interactive process, rather than a simple drainage, it works by means of opposites and not by means of similars, and it should properly be called "allopathic" rather than "homeopathic." This inference is supported by passages directly concerning katharsis and by Aristotle's theoretical account of action and passion in *Generation and Corruption*. Second, Aristotelian physical katharsis is a process of removing what prevents something from preserving or regaining the excellence ("completion" or "perfection") that is in accord with its nature. This second inference is supported by a study of biological katharsis in Aristotle's works. Medical katharsis is an obvious example of a process that removes material harmful to the body's physical excellence. However, Aristotle most frequently uses "katharsis" of the evacuation of the menstrual fluid (*katamēnia*), which is also a removal of harmful material. Aristotle thinks that the female is like a deformed male, and that her reproductive discharge has closer connections with disease than does the male's. Katharsis of the *katamēnia* is, then, a natural treatment needed to remove material harmful to the female's physical excellence.

While Aristotle's views on psychic katharsis are more elusive, there are numerous indications that he thought of it as analogous to an allopathic medical katharsis. Psychic treatments, he notes, work by means of opposites, just as medical treatments do. In *Politics* 8, moreover, psychic katharsis is explicitly compared to medical katharsis. Other analogies in Aristotle also support an allopathic interpretation. Aristotelian psychic katharsis appears to be a process, effected by means of opposites, that removes what prevents the soul from preserving or regaining the excellence that is in accord with its nature. Unlike physical katharsis, however, psychic katharsis helps produce excellence in the first place. This allopathic view of psychic katharsis is also supported by passages in ancient writers other than Aristotle. These texts suggest that Aristotle was part of a tradition within which an allopathic psychic katharsis, analogous to a medical katharsis, was widely accepted. In chapter 10 I will examine how this background information and these plausible inferences aid the interpretation of tragic katharsis.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ I am indebted to Allan Gotthelf for criticisms of earlier drafts of the first two sections of this chapter, and to Richard Kraut for comments on an earlier draft of the discussion of the elenchus.