

## Ethical Aspects of the Emotions of Fear and Pity in Aristotle's Poetics:

Emphasizing Aristotle's Poetics of Steven Halliwell

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**Abstract** In *Rhetorics*, Aristotle introduced fear and pity as selfish and altruistic emotions that resulted in the unfortunate suffering caused by the unexpected occurrence of devastating calamities in the past or future for a good human being similar to and better than us. These emotions occur in tragedy, which is the imitation of actions and life, in the same circumstances as described for life in *Rhetorics*. In tragedy, according to Aristotle's *Poetics*, the arousal of fear and pity in the audience moderates these emotions and thus purifies them. This arousal of emotions is the result of the ignorance of the average virtuous character of the tragedy about the nature of his voluntary action during the plot of the tragedy, which is the result of the urgency of depriving the external goods and leads him to behavior in which the moral middle ground is not observed. Eventually, however, according to Aristotle, the moral middle ground is fulfilled in both the ideal character and the audience of the tragedy.

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**Introduction:** One of the reasons given for writing *Poetics* is that Aristotle intended to explain the place of tragedy in his philosophical system. One of the most important points of Aristotle's discussion for such an explanation in the *Poetics* and in the connection between his ethics and his theory of tragedy is the emotions of fear and pity that Aristotle thinks are evoked in the audience of tragedy. The purpose of this article is to show how, in Aristotle's point of view, the emotions of fear and pity find a moral dimension in tragedy. To this end, this article first describes how the moral aspect of tragedy is fulfilled by modifying the selfish and altruistic aspects of the emotions of fear and pity in Aristotle's theory of tragedy. Second, the ethical aspect of finding the emotions of fear and pity in the audience of a tragedy as a result of the link between the arousal of these emotions and the ignorance of

the character about the nature of his actions has been studied. Finally, the relationship between plot structure and character and moral aspects of the emotions of fear and pity in tragedy from Aristotle's point of view have been studied. Regarding the background and literature of the subject, Mostafavi (1396) in the article entitled *The Birth of Morality in the Heart of Tragedy; Defending the Moral Interpretation of Aristotelian Catharsis*, has considered the emotions of fear and pity as Aristotle's cause of moderation in the human soul and happiness. Young (2016) in *Philosophy of Tragedy: from Plato to Žižek* considers the moral interpretation of the evocation of fear and pity in tragedy as a modified form of its psychological interpretation. In discussing the moral aspects of the emotions of fear and pity in tragedy, Martha Nussbaum in the book of *Aristotle* emphasizes a close relationship with the

epistemological and educational aspects of emotions from Aristotle's point of view. Halliwell (2009) in the sixth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics* describes the position of the emotions of fear and pity in the *Poetics*, an important part of which is related to the moral aspects of these emotions. Our article, relying on the Halliwell's method, seeks to examine and clarify the moral aspect of the emotions of fear and pity in tragedy in a more coherent way than Halliwell.

**Methodology:** This study was descriptive-Analytical and the data were collected through library research.

**Findings:** Aristotle introduces pity in *Rhetorics* as a strong altruistic and selfish emotion. In his view, we should sympathize with morally good people who fail unjustly, but that empathy should come from observing the destructive or painful evil that the evil we expect to happen to ourselves,

and that it seems about to happen. According to Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, there are both an element of selfishness and selfishness in the subject of friendship, in which the highest degree of pity occurs, because every friend intends to achieve happiness for himself by being superior to another friend in goodness to his friend. In *Rhetorics*, the emotion of fear is also presented as a selfish and altruistic emotion. In his opinion, we are afraid of great and destructive evils by those at a time when we did not expect it and it happened to our superior, so it is likely that it will happen to us as well. According to Aristotle, we feel fear and pity for those who are similar to us and superior to us. Thus, there must be a distance between the subject and the object of the emotion so that the selfish aspect of the emotion does not erase the other selfish aspect. Fear and pity in tragedy occur as a result of imitating the actions that take place in life, but the poet

brings imitations of the actions of life into tragedy so that they can evoke the emotions of fear and compassion. The audience created a kind of catharsis of these emotions in him. In tragedy, too, there are imitations of selfish and altruistic emotions, the characteristics of which Aristotle enumerated in the *Rhetorics*. In the thirteenth chapter of *Poetics*, Aristotle considers the fear and pity of the audience towards the ideal character of tragedy as possible if the character commits a moral error (Hamartia), which, of course, does not deviate from the path of happiness and virtue forever. Also, this error occurs in the context for him, which indicates a kind of compulsion and urgency to deprive him of external goodness. So, there is a kind of innocence in character error. In the fourteenth chapter of the *Poetics*, a feeling of fear and pity occurs for a character who refuses on the verge of committing a moral error. In

these two seasons, the hero of the tragedy is like us in that he may commit a moral error, and he is superior to us in that he does not deviate from the path of happiness forever. Thus, in tragedy, both our selfish and altruistic emotions are aroused towards the hero of the tragedy.

### **D**iscussion and Conclusion:

According to Aristotle, in *Nicomachean's Ethics*, a person is morally good whose voluntary actions are virtuous and end with good ends in (Eudaimonia). Voluntary action is a virtue in which the moral middle ground is observed, that is, it is balanced and there is no excess in it. But this virtuous voluntary action can only be judged morally through the context of the action. In tragedy, which is an imitation of life's actions, the same rule must be observed by the hero of the tragedy in order to be able to balance the

emotions of fear and pity in the audience in order to fulfill their moral aspect. This is what happens in tragedy when, like life, a balance is struck between the selfish and altruistic aspects of the emotions of fear and pity. This occurs when the hero of a tragedy is morally similar to us on the one hand and superior to us on the other. In the thirteenth chapter of *Poetics*, the hero of the tragedy is like us because he commits a moral error and is superior to us because his error occurred in the context of urgency and compulsion and he compensates his error and returns to the path of happiness. In the fourteenth chapter of *Poetics*, the hero of the tragedy is like us because he may commit a moral error, and he is superior to us because he refuses to do so on the verge of committing a mistake. As a result, in both cases the

balance of the selfish and altruistic aspects of the emotions of fear and pity and, consequently, the moral aspect of these emotions are fulfilled.

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