AGRS 124 Final

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SECTION A(i)

[1] The rhapsode Ion (in the later pages of the *Ion*) claims to be able to speak well on every single one of the subjects that Homer talks about, and to speak better about them than other people. What kinds of topics in Homer does Socrates bring up for the purpose of arguing against Ion's claim? How does Ion resist Socrates's counterargument? What approach to Homer's poetry does Ion seem to take, and how does it differ from the approach that Socrates seems to *want* him to take?

Socrates uses many different topics to argue against Ion's claim, some notable ones being medicine, carpentry, and charioteering among many others. The topics Socrates mentions in his argument are all specialized disciplines which require very particular skills, which he uses to make the argument that only practitioners of said skill will truly be able to speak well on that subject. As Ion is but a rhapsode, he does not possess any of these specializations, and thus he cannot possibly "speak well" on every single one of these topics, no matter how gifted Ion believes himself to be. Faced with this argument, Ion at first blindly ignores Socrates' argument since when he is asked again to "pick out [...] the sorts of things that concern the rhapsode's skills", Ion still replies with "everything" despite Socrates demonstrating that to be impossible. Ion then later claims he knows well "[what] is appropriate for a man [...] or [a] freeman should say", yet this is also easily countered by Socrates when he points out that a doctor would know better than a rhapsode what to say when "in charge of a sick person". This interaction between Ion and Socrates highlights the difference in how Ion and Socrates view Homer's poetry: Ion believes he speaks well about Homer because he is able to deliver Homer's poetry powerfully to his audience, but this is fundamentally different than what Socrates believes defines "speaking well", as he believes that speaking well entails a level of expertise in the subject matter Homer talks about, a quality which Ion demonstrably lacks.

[3] Explain the distinction that Socrates draws in Book 3 of the *Republic* between "pure narrative" and "narrative conveyed through imitation." How does the distinction apply to the poetry of Homer? What style of narrative does Socrates want his Guardians to use, and why?

In *Republic 3*, "pure narrative" refers to the passive retelling of a sequence of events, and as Socrates puts it, "the poet speaks in his own person, and doesn't try to make us think that the speaker is anyone other than himself". This is contrasted with "narrative conveyed through imitation", which refers to an active retelling, where the poet "tries as hard as possible to make us think that it is not [the poet] speaking", but instead the character within the story being told. In other words, in "narrative conveyed through imitation" the poet tries to replicate the actions and emotions of the character, whereas in "pure narrative" the poet merely *describes* the emotions felt by the character. Socrates continues this argument and says that in epic poetry, like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, use a combination of both pure narrative and narrative through imitation. With respect to the Guardians of his ideal city, Socrates concludes that the Guardians should imitate, but only "imitate what is appropriate to them" as "we want them to be good men" and should "not do anything mean or otherwise disgraceful". The reason such limitations are imposed on Guardians is because in Socrates' view, if the Guardians were to imitate such things, there is a possibility that "as a result of the imitation they are infected with the reality." In other words, it is possible that as a result of imitating "disgraceful" behavior, then the nature of Guardians as "good men" is undermined; therefore, given these risks Socrates argues that we should disallow this type of imitation entirely.

[5] In *Republic* Book 10, what is the "greatest charge against poetry" that Socrates describes himself as bringing? Why is it a greater charge than the charge that immediately precedes it? What is it about the effect of (a) tragic and (b) comic drama on the audience that especially worries Socrates when presenting the "greatest charge"?

In Book 10, the "greatest charge against poetry" refers to poetry's "power to corrupt even good men", which Socrates views as a danger in his ideal republic. As Socrates argues, when we listen to a poet deliver "a long speech of lamentation", we find that "even the best of us [sympathize], give ourselves up to it [and] praise the poet who most affects us in this way". Yet, "when the sorrow is our own, we pride ourselves in [our ability to] keep calm and be strong", which runs directly counter to the emotions we praised the poet for evoking in us earlier. A similar argument can be made in the case of comedic drama, as "jokes which you are ashamed of making yourself" for fear of being ridiculed are precisely the ones we "very much enjoy in comedy". In both these cases, imitative poetry is demonstrated to "release that part of [ourselves] that our reason [ought] to restrain", fuelling our tendencies to experience emotions that should be kept in check. This is a greater charge than the earlier claim that poetry depicts "part[s] of the soul" that are "inferior in relation to the truth," because while that faults poetry for falsehood, there is far greater danger associated with poetry's ability to corrupt the moral character that threatens the very fabric of the society Socrates aims to create, if we are to create a society of "better and happier people rather than worse and more miserable".

SECTION A(ii)

[6] In Ch. 4 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle gives two ways in which imitative poetry is natural to us. What are they? Aristotle uses a comparison with painting to explain the pleasure we take in mimesis. How does the example of the pleasure we take in viewing paintings of disgusting objects serve to make Aristotle's point? In chapter 13 Aristotle claims that if a situation represented in tragic drama is disgusting or repulsive, it cannot give the proper pleasure of tragedy. How can we reconcile this with what he says about painting in chapter 4?

Aristotle argues that imitative poetry is natural to us because "the instinct for imitation is inherent in human beings [...], [we] learn our earliest lessons by imitation", and that we also innately have an "instinct to enjoy works of imitation". To Aristotle's second point, he shows our "knack" for consuming imitative works by arguing that "we enjoy looking at the most accurate representations" of even things "which in themselves we find painful to see", because although the depiction may be repulsive, we "learn as we look at them", and we derive pleasure from it because "learning [in itself] is a very great pleasure". In a sense, Aristotle argues that our desire to learn and understand overcomes all other emotions we feel when we look at a painting – even those of disgust – highlighting our innate instinct to enjoy works of imitation. In chapter 13, while Aristotle does argue that disgusting imagery should not exist in tragedy because it is "the most untragic of all plots", this is nevertheless consistent with what Aristotle describes in chapter 4 because he only uses the depiction of painful imagery to demonstrate our innate interest in imitation, but never fully advocates for its inclusion in any particular work, including tragedies. Further, Aristotle argues that tragedies should be characterized by being able to evoke emotions of "pity and fear", emotions which are entirely distinct from those of curiosity and learning that we feel when we look at a work which is disgusting or repulsive. As such, there is no true contradiction between what Aristotle says in chapter 4 compared to chapter 13.

[7] Aristotle calls the plot the "soul" of tragedy. What does he seem to mean by this metaphor? On what grounds does he consider plot more important to the success of a tragedy than character is?

In *Poetics*, Aristotle calls the plot the "soul" tragedy because of all the elements he lists as constituents of tragedy: "plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song", the plot is regarded as "the most important" element within a tragedy; hence, Aristotle equates it equivalent to the "soul" of the tragedy itself. As Aristotle writes, "tragedy is the representation of action" and as such the plot, which drives the action forward can certainly be considered the most important element, more important than character. Aristotle furthers this point by explaining how "there could not be a tragedy without action, but there can be without character", and that a tragedy "which has a plot giving an ordered combination of incidents" would be more effective than one which solely contains "well composed speeches of character". In that same vein, Aristotle also provides the analogy that in painting, an artist who "daub[s] his canvas with the most beautiful colors at random" would not be as effective "as he would [be] by drawing a recognizable image in black and white", and in parallel, shows how it is possible to have tragedy without character but it is impossible without the plot. Finally, perhaps the most important piece of evidence Aristotle provides, is the fact that the two most distinctive features of tragedies: "reversals" and "recognitions" are both elements of the plot, which further drive home Aristotle's point that the plot is far more important than character in tragedies, as tragedies without plot would be lacking these two features.

[10] What relation between work, play, and leisure does Aristotle establish in Book 8 of the Politics? How does leisure differ from play? How does the relation between these three affect the subjects that Aristotle includes in his curriculum and excludes from it? How does music, as one of the traditional subjects of Greek education, differ from the other subjects (reading and writing, drawing, and physical training)? Why does Aristotle lay so much emphasis on music in Book 8, compared to the other traditional subjects?

In book 8 of *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes work, play and leisure in the following ways: as described in chapter 3, work is described as activities which "involves labor and exertion", and play is described as "a thing to be chiefly used in connection with work", serving as "a relief from exertion" that "provides relaxation". Leisure, by contrast, is described as "involv[ing] pleasure, happiness and well being", or more succinctly as "one of the ways in which a freeman should pass his time". This distinguishes leisure from play as it is not used as relaxation from work, but rather is regarded as a pursuit that all "freemen" should aim for. In terms of his curriculum, Aristotle argues we should teach subjects which are conducive to experiencing leisure as an end, and to look beyond the utilitarian function of activities like reading and writing, as they are means that "allow other kinds of learning [to] become possible". As he puts it, "to aim at utility everywhere is utterly unbecoming [...] to those who have the character of freemen". Music is especially notable in Book 8 because unlike other traditional subjects like reading and writing, music has the ability to contribute toward "relaxation, amusement" and to a "cultivated way of living", a combination that cannot be found in the other subjects. As such, music's ability to affect "the character of the soul" makes it stand out among traditional subjects, and is why Aristotle puts so much emphasis on it in Book 8.

SECTION B

[11] Horace says that poets aim either to benefit or to please their audiences, or to do both. In what way, according to Horace, can a poet most readily benefit the audience, and in what way most readily please them? What does he say is the point of a poet's trying to do both?

To be specific, the passage in question here is when Horace mentions that "poets aim either to benefit or to please, or to combine [them together]," showing his belief in the ways poetry can influence the audience. When poetry is meant to benefit the audience, Horace recommends that we "be succinct" with our language, so that "receptive minds may easily grasp what you are saying and retain it firmly". He warns against any "superfluous" language as a long, drawn out passage has the risk of "going in one ear and out the other", ruining the effectiveness of the overarching message. When a poem is meant to please the audience, Horace recommends that the work should be "as true to life as possible", and that to this end the poem should not try to "demand belief for anything" that is out of the ordinary. Horace then says that a poet should in fact aim to do both, as "elder citizens would disapprove of works lacking in edification" (i.e. works that are only for pleasure), and "plays that are too serious" will not be interesting to the younger generation. In trying to do both at the same time, the poet allows his work to be accessible to the entire audience and "win everyone's approbation, for he delights his reader [and also] instructs him". This is the highest level of achievement for the poet, as such a work would "not only make him money but is also carried to distant lands and ensures lasting fame for its author".

[14] Briefly explain how Augustine reconciles his belief that what Moses wrote (i.e. the books of Moses in the Bible) must be true, with the belief that it does no harm if he, Augustine, understands the bible to have a different meaning from that which Moses had in mind.

In his confessions, Augustine reconciles this apparent dilemma by arguing that while his interpretation of the Bible may differ from Moses's intentions, as long as the interpretation is truthful then it is a valid interpretation of the Bible. He supports this claim by first arguing that even "if Moses himself appeared to us and said: 'This is what I was thinking'", that we wouldn't be able to "see what was in his mind". This demonstrates the impossibility for any reader to truly understand what Moses meant in the passages he wrote, because his mind is independent from the words he speaks. Augustine also cautions against arguing that one opinion is above all, as it is "foolish [to assert] that out of all [the] perfectly true meanings which can be extracted that one particular meaning was the one which Moses intended". This further highlights the impossibility as a reader to assert one interpretation above others, and shows that truly understanding what Moses could have meant is an idealistic impossibility. Faced with the impossibility of knowing what Moses had in mind, Augustine asks, "why should we not believe that all these truths were seen by Moses", so that "when he was writing these words he was entirely aware [...] of all the truth that we have been able to find"? This is precisely Augustine's argument to reconcile this dilemma – because it is impossible to know what Moses could have meant, any truthful interpretation is considered valid, and by extension, so is Augustine's own belief in what Moses meant.

SECTION C

[17] In his essay of the standard of taste, what does Hume eventually settle upon as the "true standard of taste and beauty"? And what are the characteristics of this "standard"?

Hume regards the "true standard of taste and beauty" as the "joint verdict" of a collective of critics which have "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison and cleared of all prejudice". Firstly, Hume views this standard not as the opinion of one particular critic, but rather the "joint verdict" from a collective of opinions that qualifies as the "true standard of taste", as "the organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect as to allow the general principles their full play" – basically, individual opinions vary far too much to create a reliable standard. Furthermore, Hume also highlights the qualities that he believes makes a good critic: having a "strong sense" allows one to "discern the beauties of design", without "delicate sentiment", the "finer touches pass unnoticed and disregarded". Without practice, "his verdict is attended with confusion and hesitation", without comparison "the most frivolous beauties [...] are the object of his admiration" and under the influence of prejudice "his natural sentiments are perverted". In this sense, Hume makes it clear that without any one of these five characteristics, the opinions of a critic become clouded and erroneous, preventing them from making a "sound judgement" and contributing toward a collective "standard of taste". Along with the defining qualities of the standard of taste, Hume also argues that time plays a factor as it removes obstructions of "envy and jealousy" present in a "narrow circle", sentiments which prevent us from establishing an objective standard.

[18] How, according to Lessing, does the example of the statue of Laocoon support a distinction between the capabilities of visual vs. verbal art?

In Lessing's essay, he establishes the idea that "ancient artists either refrained from depicting [gruesome] emotions or reduced them [...] to show a certain measure of beauty". In other words, Lessing argues that within visual art, due to the Greek values of only "represent[ing] the beautiful", this has spawned a trend of "softening extreme physical pain to a less intense degree" compared to their poetic counterparts. In the specific case of the statue of Laocoon, the poetic depiction "expresses [Laocoon's] scream with deliberate intention", yet in the statue the "scream had to be softened to a sigh". This, in Lessing's view, is due to the aforementioned principle of "beauty [as] the supreme law of the visual arts" as keeping the scream unaltered would "distort the features in a disgusting manner" turning it into a "repulsive figure from which we gladly turn away". As a result of these alterations, the "beauty and pain" depicted in the statue may properly "inspire feeling[s] of pity", precisely the sentiment the statue intended to evoke. The example of Laocoon highlights the distinction between visual and verbal art as the muted expressions we find show how in visual art, the expressions of characters must be tempered for fear of its gruesomeness cancelling out its potential beauty. Verbal art, on the other hand, has no such restriction, and is allowed to describe the same scene in more gruesome detail without fear of it possibly overwhelming the audience.