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A Noble Pity: ἔλεος in Plato's Philosophy

Pity (ἔλεος), broadly understood as an emotional response to another's misfortune, had a prominent role in Athenian culture. Pity's significance was particularly evident in dramatic and judicial contexts², whose mechanisms afforded groups of citizens opportunities to witness the staged or reported predicaments of others. It is no surprise, then, that both Plato and Aristotle commented on this emotion, albeit in apparently contrasting ways – Plato's stated disregard for pity³ (in *Apology* and *Republic*) standing at odds with Aristotle's appraisal of it as a legitimate and even desirable response (in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*). Given the scope and extent of pity's role in Greek thought, however, one may revisit and reassess this commonplace opposition, and especially its guiding premise, namely that Plato did away with pity entirely. I argue in this essay against this assumption, proposing instead that Plato conceived a form of pity that would constitute an

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² In his book *Pity Transformed*, David Konstan devotes a whole chapter to the role of pity in the judicial context of Ancient Greece and Rome and shows how the appeal to pity was considered to be a legitimate part of the defendant's demonstration of his innocence. Cf. D. Konstan, *Pity Transformed*. London. 2001, p. 49-75.

³ Rana Saadi (*Pity and Disgust in Plato's Republic: The Case of Leontius*, "Classical Philology" 108 (2013) p. 179-201) proposes a reading of *Republic* as a dialogue that disavows pity. There, Saadi identifies Leontius' desire to look at the criminal corpses as an instance of pity, which she characterizes as a "lawless and irrational" emotion of the appetitive part of the soul. Saadi's reading is debatable on several grounds. Indeed, there is no textual mention of this emotion in the passage, and Plato's description of Leontius' response to the corpses does not fit any conventional characterization of pity; moreover, Saadi's conflation of the different partitions of the soul and her allocation of pity in the appetitive part are problematic due to the lack of a clear Platonic stance about the place of pity in the soul.

appropriate answer to a specific kind of misfortune. To understand pity in this sense, I will address Plato's disapproval of pitiful representations in judicial and dramatic contexts, as presented in *Apology* and *Republic*. Then, I will comment on Socrates' statement, in *Gorgias*, that the tyrant is pitiable. Finally, I will address Plato's assessment of pity as part of the noble character in the *Laws* and will consider pity's relationship to anger and punishment.

1. Plato's Apparent Distrust of Pity

1.1. Socrates' Rejection of Pitiful Scenes (τὰ ἐλεῖνὰ ταῦτα δράματα)

Socrates' speech in Plato's *Apology* is an odd defense of his case. Not satisfied with refuting the charges pressed against him, Socrates insists on maintaining the conduct that has infuriated his accusers: "whether you believe Anytus or not, whether you acquit me or not, do so on the understanding that this is my course of action, even if I am to face death many times"⁴. Moreover, he challenges social and judicial conventions by rejecting customary practices in his address to the jury. After contesting the charges, Socrates explains why he did not resort to conventional strategies to elicit the jury's pity. To understand Socrates' challenge, it will be useful to briefly examine the place that pity occupied in Athenian trials.

One striking feature of the Athenian approach to pity was its rightful place in judicial contexts. Rhetoricians considered eliciting pity as a useful device that, far from being a deceptive fallacy, played a role in demonstrating the defendant's innocence. As David Konstan (*The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*, Toronto 2006) argues in his analysis of this emotion, pity depended on the appraisal of someone's misfortune as undeserved and rested on the evidence of innocence afforded by the accused⁵. This prerequisite is present in surviving testimonies of appeals to pity in judicial contexts and in the most detailed analysis of emotions in Greek philosophy: Aristotle's *Rhetoric*⁶. There, Aristotle outlines one of the cognitive conditions that enabled pity,

⁴ Plato, *Apologia* 30b7- c1.

⁵ Cf. Konstan, *Pity Transformed*, p. 34 and D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*, Toronto 2006, p. 202.

⁶ Aristoteles, *Rhetorica* II 1385b.

namely the belief that the observed misfortune was undeserved⁷. Although Konstan's assertion that Greek pity, in general, was founded on this belief is controversial⁸, it is clear that, at least in the context of a trial where one party should be favored and another punished, the appeal to pity was strongly linked to the claim of innocence⁹.

Given this Athenian belief that eliciting pity in the jury was a way of underlining one's innocence, it is understandable that Socrates feels compelled explain his reasons for not resorting to this strategy. Otherwise, he runs the risk of irritating his audience and making them cast their vote in anger (θεῖτο ἄν μετ' ὀργῆς τὴν ψῆφον)¹⁰. The rejected strategy, it is explained, would consist not only in a verbal appeal to the jury's pity but also in provoking this emotion by crying and bringing the accused's family to court¹¹. Such 'pitiful scenes' (τὰ ἐλεινὰ ταῦτα δράματα)¹², as he calls them, must be avoided because they damage one's reputation and they are unjust¹³.

Regarding the first charge, Socrates explains that his reluctance to engage in these scenes stems not from the fact that he is brave in the face of death¹⁴. If that were the case, making a pitiful scene would only damage his reputation as a brave man. On the contrary, he considers these scenes

⁷ The other two cognitive conditions are the appraisal of the other's sufferings as significant and the belief that one is vulnerable to the same misfortune. For a detailed analysis of Aristotelian pity, cf. M. Nussbaum, *Aristotle on Emotions and Rational Persuasion in Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Los Angeles 1996.

⁸ Norman Sandridge (*Felling Vulnerable but Not Too Vulnerable: Pity in Sophocles' Oedipus Coloneus, Ajax and Philoctetes*, "The Classical Journal" 103 (2008) p. 433-448) and Rachana Kamtekar (*Platonic Pity, or Why Compassion Is Not a Platonic Virtue Emotions in Plato*, Boston 2020) have noticed instances in Greek literature in which characters pity people who seem to deserve their misfortunes. According to Kamtekar, "Aristotle needs to give an account of the typical or suitable conditions for the arousal or removal of the feelings, not an account of the necessary and sufficient conditions to cover every case" (p. 313). Indeed, Aristotle deals with a context in which pity is elicited by discursive means; however, there may be instances of pity in which this belief is absent.

⁹ See Sandridge, *Felling Vulnerable but Not Too Vulnerable*, p. 435.

¹⁰ Plato, *Apologia* 34c, 3-5.

¹¹ Socrates discards these scenes because they imply a fear of death and distract the jury from what is relevant. As he develops this argument to state why he rejects this strategy (34d, 9), we may think that, for him, bringing loved ones to the courtroom seizes on the jury's fear of death and distracts them.

¹² Plato, *Apologia* 34e, 2-5 and 35b, 9-c 2.

¹³ Here, I develop Rachana Kamtekar's analysis of Socrates' argument as a two-fold rejection of pitiful scenes that, crucially, does not reject pity *per se*. Cf. Kamtekar, *Platonic Pity*.

¹⁴ Plato, *Apologia* 34e, 1-2.

as dishonorable in general, and goes on to develop the charge of disgracefulness in three stages: eliciting pity in the courtroom is disgraceful for himself, for virtuous men in general, and for the whole city. At all three levels, asking for pity implies an ill-founded fear of death, one that makes the request disreputable.

Firstly, staging a pitiful scene would be disgraceful for Socrates' reputation because of his age and because he is believed to be different from most men¹⁵. Regarding his age – seventy – Konstan argues that pity was usually reserved for those who faced untimely deaths¹⁶, so appealing to this emotion would not be becoming for an elderly citizen. Regarding his difference from other men, Socrates makes explicit what he thinks might be the feature separating him from most people:

It is perhaps on this point and in this respect, gentlemen, that I differ from the majority of people (διαφέρω τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων), and if I were to claim that I am wiser than anyone in anything, it would be in this, that, as I have no adequate knowledge of things in the underworld, so I do not think I have¹⁷.

A few lines before this quote¹⁸, Socrates equated being afraid of death and thinking that one is wise when one is not. For him, fear of death depends on the belief that death is terrible, but no one can confidently assert this view (for all we know, death might be the greatest blessing). When Socrates admits that he does not have adequate knowledge of things in the underworld, then, he is also making clear that he is not afraid of death. These two claims differentiate him from most men and, as noted above, are among the reasons for not engaging in pitiful scenes. Thus, according to Socrates, eliciting pity betrays false beliefs about death. This charge is conspicuous in the next stage of his challenge.

Apart from being disgraceful for himself, these pitiful scenes are disgraceful for any man considered to be superior in wisdom (σοφία) and courage (ἀνδρεία). The reason for this echoes what we have just noted with regard to Socrates' reputation. In trying to elicit pity during a trial, the seemingly virtuous man betrays his appraisal of death as something dreadful (δεινός); he behaves in a way improper for Athenian men. The

¹⁵ Plato, *Apologia* 34e, 4-6.

¹⁶ Konstan, *Pity Transformed*, p. 42.

¹⁷ Plato, *Apologia* 29b, 2-6.

¹⁸ Plato *Apologia* 29a, 4-b, 2.

disgracefulness of these acts, performed by so-called virtuous men, eventually brings dishonor to the city because any stranger who witnesses the best citizens engaging in this behavior will think that the most reputable Athenians are no better than women¹⁹.

In addition to the rejection of pitiful scenes on the grounds of their disgraceful nature, Socrates argues that it is not just (οὐδὲ δίκαιόν) to be acquitted by means of arousing pity in the jury. This charge might, in turn, be considered two-fold; Socrates first develops an argument about the unlawfulness of this practice and, based on this claim, asserts its unholiness. For Socrates, pitiful scenes are unjust because they induce the jury to decide without due consideration of laws. There is a difference between begging (δεῖσθαι) to be acquitted, on the one hand, and, on the other, convincing (πείθειν) a jury by appealing to a legal framework. In responding to pitiful scenes, the jury dispenses justice as a gift or favor (καταχαρίζεσθαι τὰ δίκαια) instead of delivering it according to the law (δικάσειν κατὰ τοὺς νόμους)²⁰.

Here, one may be tempted to think that Socrates is making a distinction between rational and irrational means of reaching a verdict. However, this distinction is not present in the passage. Instead, he seems to be concerned with the relevance of what may be brought to the courtroom. By attending to the pitiful scene of the defendant, the jury runs the risk of passing a verdict that disregards laws and heeds circumstances alien to the charges at stake; this would constitute perjury (ἐπιορκεῖν), as the jury's oath demands that they decide in accordance with the laws and on the specific issue that is the subject of prosecution²¹. In this way, the injustice of the appeal to pity explains its unholiness because dispensing justice as a favor constitutes a violation of the jury's holy oath. In *Apology*, in short, Socrates does not condemn pity per se; instead, he condemns pitiful scenes because they are based on false beliefs about death and because they distract the jury from what is relevant to the case.

¹⁹ Plato *Apologia* 35a, 1-b, 3.

²⁰ Plato *Apologia* 35b, 9-c, 5.

²¹ Demosthenes cites this oath and includes clauses such as: "I will vote in accordance with the laws and the decrees" (Demosthenes, *Against Timocrates* 24, 149, tr. A.T. Murray) and "I will give my verdict strictly on the charge named in the prosecution" (Demosthenes, *Against Timocrates* 24, 151).

1.2. Pity and the Images of Virtue in *Republic X*

In *Republic X*, Plato mentions pity in the last stage of his critique of poetry²², where he launches his chief accusation against this imitative art. Here, Plato regards pity as part of an undesirable and even dangerous response to dramatic representations, without, however, rejecting this emotion altogether. Although I will focus on Socrates' main charge against poetry as it relates to pity, it will be necessary to address his previous analogy between painting and poetry, since it explains why pitying tragic characters is a mistake analogous to assenting to an optical illusion.

After stating that poets “imitate images of virtue”²³ and have no grasp of the truth because their works are at a third remove from reality, Socrates discusses how poetry affects its audience. He relies on an analogy between painting and poetry to explain that imitative arts influence the base and irrational part of the soul, thereby introducing the second and third²⁴ divisions of the soul in *Republic*²⁵. Although he does not explicitly equate the parts of the soul resulting from these different partitions of the soul, the parallelisms between them and the characterizations of the parts in each case give us good reasons to believe that Plato offers two different ways of approaching the same parts of the soul²⁶.

Given their remove from the truth, painting and poetry appeal to a lower part of the soul, characterized in opposition to the λογιστικόν,

²² This is the third major critique of poetry in *Republic*. The other two take place in Books II and III. In Book II, Plato challenges poetry for how it depicts Gods and heroes; in Book III, he addresses how poets depict Hades, and reflects on the style of poetry, preferring simple narration over imitation. For an overview of these critiques, cf. C.L. Griswold, *Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry*, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford 2020.

²³ Plato, *Respublica X* 600e, 4.

²⁴ Plato, *Respublica* 602c-603b and 603c-605a, respectively.

²⁵ The issue of how Plato's argument in Book X relates to his previous proposal in Book IV is beyond the scope of this article. For an examination of this question, cf. J. Moss, *Appearances and Calculations: Plato's Division of the Soul*, in: *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. D. Sedley, New York 2008, p. 35-68. This chapter also informs much of what I argue in this section.

²⁶ The compatibility of these partitions with the previous one in R. IV has been defended by Nehamas (*Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic 10, in Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts*, New Jersey 1982), who argues that, in R.X, Plato further divides the rational part of R. IV, and, more recently, by Moss (*Plato's Appearance-Assent Account of Belief*, “Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society” 114 (2014) p. 213-238), who argues that the lower part of the soul in R. X comprises the two nonrational parts of R. IV.

the calculative part. In each case, Socrates presents a similar argument to prove that the soul has two parts. Both arguments begin with a statement of the possibility of contradiction, one within the sphere of perception and the other within the sphere of human action²⁷. Then, he presents the adequate response to these contradictions: in the case of optical illusions, measurement (τὸ μετρεῖν) shows how things really are, while in the case of human action, measure (τὸ μετριάζειν) allows the reasonable man to solve his internal conflicts²⁸. Measurement and measure are assigned to a noble part of the soul that, in the first case, is called the calculating part (λογιστικός,) and, in the second, is left unnamed but is characterized as “the best part of us that is willing to follow this rational calculation (τῷ λογισμῷ)”²⁹.

These contradictions, and the manner in which the rational part deals with them, lead to a paradox that is characterized, in the case of optical illusions, as a conflict of beliefs³⁰ – believing that a stick is bent vs. believing in its actual straightness – and, in the case of human action, as a conflict of inclinations³¹ – being prompt to publicly grieve vs. being prompt to restrain oneself. In both cases, the principle of opposites³² leads to the partition of the soul. Indeed, since it is impossible to have two contradictory beliefs or inclinations about the same thing at the same time, there must be two parts of the soul that serve as different seats for each opinion and inclination. Plato states, therefore, that there is a part of the soul that believes in accor-

²⁷ Plato, *Respublica* 602c-d and 603d.

²⁸ Plato, *Respublica* 602d and 603e-604b.

²⁹ Plato, *Respublica* 602e1 and 604d5.

³⁰ In *Plato's Appearance-Assent Account of Belief* (2014), Moss distinguishes two types of *dóxa* in Plato's work: *eikasía* and *pístis*. These types differ in: (1) their objects (*eikasía* is directed at appearances while *πίστις* is directed at the things themselves) and (2) the attitude of the subject towards the object (*eikasía* is passive yielding while *pístis* requires active investigation). The second difference explains the first one because the subject's active role enables her to have opinions about the things themselves. This does not mean that *pístis* is knowledge; it just entails that, in *pístis*, the subject distinguishes appearances from reality. According to Moss' distinction, in tragedy, *eikasía* wins the conflict of beliefs that Plato presents. Although I do not resort to this distinction, as *eikasía* does not explicitly appear here, the contrast between passive yielding and active enquiring does appear and helps us to understand Plato's critique of poetry. For this partition of the soul as a result of conflicting beliefs, cf. T.S. Ganson, *The Rational/Non-Rational Distinction in Plato's Republic*, “Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy” 36 (2009) p. 179-197.

³¹ Plato, *Respublica* 604b.

³² Cf. Plato, *Respublica* IV 406b, where Plato states this principle for the first time.

dance with measure (κατὰ τὰ μέτρα) and follows the guidance of the law³³, and another one that believes in contradiction of measure (παρὰ τὰ μέτρα) and does not follow the guidance of the law. The common feature shared by Plato's two characterizations of the lower part of the soul is that, in both cases, this part yields unreflectively to appearances. Thus, at the end of this twofold partition, Socrates says:

[...] we'll say that an imitative poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by making images (εἰδῶλα) that are far removed from the truth and by gratifying the irrational part, which cannot distinguish the large and the small but believes that the same things are large at one time and small at another³⁴.

Here, Socrates describes the part of the soul receptive to poetic images as incapable of distinguishing between different magnitudes. This characterization echoes Socrates' previous remarks about the part of the soul that believes in illusions; to this part, the same things appear as having different magnitudes and shapes³⁵. Responding to the poet's images of virtue is analogous to believing in optical illusions, as in both cases the lower part of the soul yields to false appearances.

The twofold division of the soul lays the groundwork for Plato's main critique: that poetry corrupts decent people (τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς)³⁶. Such people behave appropriately when faced with their own misfortunes³⁷. However, in contemplating the plights of others as represented by imitative poetry, they contradict the precepts of reason, abandoning themselves to sympathy³⁸. How is it possible for them to behave in this way? It might precisely be that, because they are reasonable, they see tragedy as an exceptional setting in which reason can relax its vigilance. Indeed, while children or foolish men might take the representation for reality³⁹, making a kind of ontological mistake⁴⁰, reasonable men will not confuse these two realms (i.e.,

³³ Plato, *Respublica* 604b.

³⁴ Plato, *Respublica* 605b-c.

³⁵ Cf. Moss, *Appearances and Calculations*, p. 45.

³⁶ Plato, *Respublica* 605c.

³⁷ Plato, *Respublica* 603e.

³⁸ Plato, *Respublica* 605d.

³⁹ Plato, *Respublica* 598c.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Belfiore (*Plato's Greatest Accusation against Poetry*, "Canadian Journal of Philosophy" 13 (1983) p. 60) separates the audience's mistakes into two catego-

the world of appearances and the real world). As tragedy belongs to the world of appearances, it might seem like an appropriate instance in which to apply a standard different from the one we uphold in our daily lives. Thus, in bypassing reason's measuring mechanisms, the audience yields to the appearance that public lamentation is not shameful⁴¹. This judgment contravenes a law that should serve as the standard for the reasonable part of the soul: "it is best to keep as quiet as possible in misfortunes and not get excited about them"⁴². Overlooking this law implies ignoring its two axioms: (1) that we do not know what is good or bad in these difficulties and (2) that human affairs are not worthy of great concern⁴³.

By ignoring this law and yielding to appearances, reasonable people are bound to make another serious mistake. Without the vigilance of reason, they might take what is represented as a truthful depiction of real life⁴⁴. In this case, the spectators respond to a false appearance of virtue (εἶδωλον ἀρετῆς)⁴⁵: the image of a so-called virtuous man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός) who grieves excessively⁴⁶. Just as with optical illusions, assenting to appearances yields misjudgments: in the case of the sensory illusion, the lower part of the soul believes that a stick under water is bent; in the case of staged tragedy, it believes that a man who grieves publicly can be noble⁴⁷. In the context of tragic representations, therefore, the audience's pity is directed to a false impression. Again, this error is not attributed to pity per se; instead, it is the consequence of the lower part of the soul yielding to appearances without the intervention of the λογιστικόν. Thus, Plato condemns poetry because it promotes wrong judgments about key aspects of human life: in pitying heroes, the audience assents to a false belief about virtue (i.e., that it is

ries: ontological and veridical. The ontological mistake consists in taking the copy for the original (i.e., not recognizing the copy's ontological status), while the veridical mistake consists in recognizing as true a representation that is actually false.

⁴¹ Plato, *Respublica* 606a-b.

⁴² Plato, *Respublica* 604c.

⁴³ Plato, *Respublica* 604b.

⁴⁴ This would be an example of what Belfiore calls a "veridical mistake". Cf. Belfiore, *Plato's Greatest Accusation*, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Respublica* 600e, 4.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Respublica* 606b, 1-2.

⁴⁷ While analogous, these mistakes cannot be equated: some optical illusions convey a possible state of affairs (it is possible for a stick to be bent), but no image of virtue can be true. This may be one of the reasons why Plato banishes poetry but not painting from the city.

compatible with public grieving) and false beliefs about misfortune and the worth of human affairs⁴⁸, disregarding the law of reason and its axioms⁴⁹.

What is more, tragedy weakens reason's ability to respond to misfortune outside of the theater since the vicarious experience of giving oneself in sympathy (συμπάσχω) to the plight of another induces the audience to make the other's experience their own. This critique resembles the passage in *Republic* III, where Socrates forbids guardians from engaging in imitation because it might "become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought"⁵⁰. Here, as in *Republic* III, poetry establishes a habit, not of gesture and voice, but of ill-judgment. In letting the lower part of the soul respond unreflectively to appearances, poetry inaugurates a habit of wrongly pitying and lamenting. Thus, as in *Apology*, Plato rejects pitiful representations without rejecting pity. Here, in tandem with poetry's power of creating bad habits, the false appearances enacted in tragedy explain Plato's apparent disregard for pity.

2. Towards a Noble Pity

2.1. Pity towards the tyrant in *Gorgias*

We have seen how false beliefs about death and virtue inclined jurymen and spectators of tragedies to wrongly pity suffering men. This emotion proved to be dangerous, as it led jurymen to commit perjury and created a habit of bad judgment in decent men. Nevertheless, in *Gorgias*, Socrates says that we should pity the unjust tyrant⁵¹. This appraisal of pity is grounded on the argument that the wrongdoer is more unfortunate than his victim because he must suffer his injustice, which is the greatest harm to the soul. By questioning common notions about harm, Plato opens a place for pity in his philosophy. This opening will also allow us to see how pity relates to justice, thus confirming, to a certain extent, the emotion's place in the Athenian judicial system, built, according to Danielle Allen, upon the deliberate distribution of anger and pity⁵².

⁴⁸ In 387d, Socrates censures poetry to protect reasonable men from false beliefs about these matters.

⁴⁹ Plato, *Respublica* 604b-c.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Respublica* 395d, 1-3.

⁵¹ Plato, *Gorgias* 469a.

⁵² In the absence of a theory of rights, Allen argues that emotions were the common language that enabled claims of justice and allowed the establishment of relationships

In his exchange with Polus, Socrates tries to convince him that rhetoric is not a τέχνη⁵³. Cornered by Socrates' arguments, Polus shifts the conversation, arguing that even if rhetoric is not an art, it grants tyrants and rhetoricians enviable powers such as banishing and slaughtering⁵⁴. Polus' envy seems to be grounded on the false belief that these powers are beneficial per se. For this reason, Socrates differentiates between goods (τὰ ἀγαθά) – health, wisdom, and wealth – from things that are neither good nor bad (τὰ μεταξὺ) – walking, sitting, sailing, and, surprisingly, slaughtering and banishing⁵⁵. This distinction explains why tyrants do not do what they wish (attain what is good), but only what seems best to them (which may be neutral, or even bad). Thus, the seemingly enviable powers afforded by rhetoric are in fact indifferent, and unjustly exerting them makes the tyrant pitiable⁵⁶ rather than enviable⁵⁷. To sustain the claim that pitying the unjust tyrant is a commendable response, Socrates develops two closely related arguments to prove that (1) doing wrong is more harmful than suffering it⁵⁸, and (2) avoiding the penalty is worse than paying it⁵⁹. The first of these arguments, commonly known as “the refutation of Polus”, starts with the assertion that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it. Polus grants this premise, arguably out of shame⁶⁰, and accepts Socrates' defini-

between citizens. Cf. D. Allen, *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens*, Princeton 2000, p. 150.

⁵³ Plato, *Gorgias* 462b-466a.

⁵⁴ Plato, *Gorgias* 468e, 6-9.

⁵⁵ With this list of objectively beneficial goods, Socrates closes the gap between morality and self-interest, showing how prosocial behavior is in our best interest, even if we don't know it. This affects the evaluation of actions such as slaughtering. Cf. R. Crisp, *Prudential and Moral Reasons*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*, ed. D. Star, Oxford 2018, p. 801-819.

⁵⁶ Plato, *Gorgias* 469a, 4-5.

⁵⁷ Aristotle maintains the contrast between pity and envy. Although he defines both emotions as a kind of pain (*Rh.* 1387b; 1385b), they differ because of the evaluation we make of their intentional objects. While Plato diverges from Aristotle in his appraisals of emotions, we have seen that, for him, cognition also influences emotions by changing how we see their objects (e.g., the soul's emotional response can be misled by wrong beliefs about death). Cf. Konstan, *Pity Transformed*, p. 46

⁵⁸ For injustice as harmful to the wrongdoer, see *Ap.* 30c, 7-e, 1, *Grg.* 469b, 1-c, 2, *R.* 353e, 10-354a, 9.

⁵⁹ Plato, *Gorgias* 472e, 4-7.

⁶⁰ Cf. C. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame*, Princeton 2010, p. 65-79; R. Barney, *Notes on Plato on the Kalon and the Good*, “Classical Philology” 105 (2010) p. 374.

tion of the noble or fine (καλός)⁶¹ as something pleasurable, beneficial⁶², or both – accordingly, the opposite of the noble would be the shameful, which is defined as something painful, harmful, or both. From these premises, Socrates concludes that wrongdoing is detrimental to the unjust person since it is more shameful, and it is evident that it cannot be more painful for him. This conclusion, in tandem with Socrates’ differentiation between good and indifferent things, aims to undermine the presuppositions that ground Polus’ envy towards the tyrant.

Besides demonstrating that the wrongdoer is unhappy, Socrates wants to show that the unpunished wrongdoer is most miserable. Accordingly, he argues that punishment is a benefit for the guilty person and, consequently, that the unpunished wrongdoer is worse off than the punished one. To reach that conclusion, he gets Polus to admit three premises: (1) to suffer punishment when guilty is to be justly punished, (2) all things just (δίκαια) are fine (καλά), and (3) as an action is done, so it is suffered⁶³. From these premises, Socrates leads Polus to admit that when someone punishes justly, someone is punished justly (because of the third premise). This, in turn, leads to the assertion that if someone is punished justly, she suffers some-

⁶¹ This definition (474d, 3-475b, 2) may be challenged on several grounds. Firstly, Socrates seems to equivocate perspectives, as he first speaks of beautiful things being pleasant *for the beholder*, but then includes other examples in which the pleasure/benefit would be for an *agent or participant* and not for the beholder (see G. Vlastos, *Was Polus Refuted?*, “The American Journal of Philology” 88 (1967) p. 454-460; M. Mackenzie, *Plato on Punishment*, Los Angeles 1984; Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*). Secondly, he seems to equivocate goods in his induction because his first examples deal with material goods (such as figures and colors), while his last examples are about immaterial goods (such as justice and education). For the argument to be valid, it would have to have a fixed perspective and a clear realm. Nevertheless, it may well be the case that this is not a definition at all. As Rachel Barney argues, the absence of any reference to the role of order in this account and the *ad hominem* context in which it takes place strongly suggest that rather than being a definition, Socrates’ remarks may be considered as a list of features present in what we deem to be fine. See Barney, *Notes on Plato*, p. 372.

⁶² Throughout this argument, Plato uses “benefit” (*ōphelia*) and “good” (*agathós*) interchangeably. This usage betrays a prudential notion of “good”. For a detailed explanation of this usage, cf. Barney, *Notes on Plato*, p. 368-380.

⁶³ This principle (“principle of the interconnection of modalities of correlates”, as Dodds dubbed it) applies to transitive verbs. For example, if someone hits rapidly, something is being hit rapidly. However, it does not work for other verbs. If our description were “someone hits voluntarily”, we could not hold the same description in the passive voice without changing the original meaning. Cf. M. Mackenzie, *Plato on Punishment*, Los Angeles 1984, p. 180.

thing fine (because of the second premise); and, because of the definition of the fine in the past argument, it is possible to say that, if that person suffers something fine, then she will suffer something good for her (because it is obvious that being punished is not pleasant). Therefore, punishing someone who is guilty would be beneficial for that person, and it would be preferable for them than avoiding the penalty.

With these arguments, Socrates seeks to alter Polus' appraisal of what constitutes serious harm, alongside his evaluation of the tyrant, in order to change his emotional response from envy to pity. Although it is not clear exactly why injustice is so deleterious to the wrongdoer's soul⁶⁴, Plato acknowledges that, when grounded in correct beliefs, pity is an appropriate response to someone who suffers (even if that person is not aware of her suffering). Thus, far from disregarding this emotion or offering an entirely new conception of it, Plato demonstrates in *Gorgias* the beliefs capable of grounding a rightful pity.

Showing that injustice is a serious harm for the wrongdoer also helps sustain the Socratic assertion that wrongdoing is involuntary. As we have seen, Socrates argued that, in doing unjust actions, the tyrant does not do what he really wants, but only what appears best for him⁶⁵. Indeed, as with all other actions, the unjust action is undertaken for the sake of happiness; however, it damages the soul and impedes the achievement of happiness, thus contradicting the tyrant's real desires⁶⁶. This account of pity as an emotion directed towards someone whose acts have unwillingly brought them serious harm could be read, *prima facie*, as akin to Aristotle's assertion that pity is directed towards involuntary actions⁶⁷. Nevertheless, as Rachana Kamtekar shows in *Platonic Pity, or Why Compassion Is Not a Platonic Virtue*, Aristotle conceives of pity as an emotion based upon the exoneration of the pitied person; consequently, for him, it is incompatible with recognizing that person as a wrongdoer⁶⁸. In contrast, as we have seen,

⁶⁴ However, as Brickhouse and Smith argue (*Socrates on How Wrongdoing Damages the Soul*, "The Journal of Ethics" 11 (2007) p. 348), it is not necessary to resort to *Republic's* psychology to explain this harm. In his discussion with Calicles, Socrates argues that punishment serves to discipline one's soul by hindering the feeding of appetites (505c-506a). Thus, punishment can help avoid the damage of wrongdoing in the soul, which may be seen as the progressive erosion of the soul's cognitive functioning; this would make the correct evaluation of actual benefit a difficult task to perform.

⁶⁵ Plato, *Gorgias* 467b-468e.

⁶⁶ Cf. Kamtekar, *Platonic Pity*, p. 81-105.

⁶⁷ Aristoteles, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1109b, 31-32.

⁶⁸ Cf. Kamtekar, *Platonic Pity*, p. 320.

Platonic pity is consistent with – but not limited to⁶⁹ – identifying the pitied person as a wrongdoer. This is a considerable difference; however, the fact that Platonic pity may be directed towards a wrongdoer does not entail that, for Plato, pity is compatible with the appraisal of the pitied harm as something deserved. As I will show in the final section, studying pity in the context of the Platonic proposal of a reformative justice will show that, for him, no one deserves to endure the ultimate consequences of wrongdoing, which are to be avoided through punishment.

2.2. Pity, Anger, and Punishment in *Laws*

In *Laws*, just as in *Gorgias*, pity is said to be directed towards someone in need of punishment⁷⁰. As we already noted, this position is grounded in two main ideas: that wrongdoing is harmful to the unjust person, and that punishment repairs the harm done by injustice. The fifth book of *Laws* maintains these theses and further qualifies them. The Athenian asserts that the most severe consequence of wrongdoing is to have one's soul corrupted by injustice, which means growing like those who are evil. This resemblance to the evil gradually distances the wrongdoer from good men and makes his soul most deformed (κακοσχημονέστατα) and dishonored (ἀτιμότατα)⁷¹.

⁶⁹ In *Laws*, for example, lonely foreigners are said to deserve human and divine pity (729e, 6). Mentioning the gods may suggest that this pity follows a divine model. In pitying a lonely stranger, one wouldn't be required to believe that friendlessness is a serious misfortune, just as the gods understand human predicaments without believing that they, too, are prone to suffer the same evils (Lg. 653c-d). Understanding how bad loneliness may seem to the friendless may be sufficient to feel an appropriate pity that does not entail the evaluations of the pitied person. See also Kamtekar, *Platonic Pity, or Why Compassion Is Not a Platonic Virtue Emotions in Plato*, 324f.

⁷⁰ However, in *Republic*, an appropriate pity seems to be elicited by someone who lacks sound judgment or is unwillingly hindered in their pursuit of knowledge. A telling example would be Socrates' response to Thrasymachus' interruption in *R.* 336e, 10, where he ironically asks for Thrasymachus' pity and argues that "if Polemarchus and I made an error in our investigation, you should know that we did so unwillingly". This example is consistent with the pity felt by the man who, upon seeing the light outside of the cave, thinks about the fate of his former companions, who are still trapped and do not know the real world (*R.* 516c, 6). I believe that the unjust person in *Gorgias* and *Laws* may be like the prisoners in the cave, insofar as both are deceived by false appearances that prevent them from accessing reality and achieving what is truly good.

⁷¹ Plato, *Leges* 728a-b.

Such harm to the soul is identified firstly as the greatest judgment (δίκη) on evildoing. A few lines on, however, the Athenian rectifies his statement by saying that such a state of the soul cannot be called “judgment”, because justice and judgment are fine (καλὸν) things⁷². Instead, it should be called vengeance (τιμωρία): the suffering that follows injustice⁷³.

It is worth noting, however, that, in *Laws*, τιμωρία seems to have two related senses, subsumed by the definition “the suffering that follows injustice”⁷⁴. We have already pointed out the first one: vengeance as the harmful and deformed state of the soul that results from wrongdoing. The second sense would be vengeance as a kind of conventional punishment that, when ruled by justice, contributes either to the reformation of the criminal or to her purgation from society⁷⁵. In this last sense, τιμωρία would depend on justice, although it might include punishments such as beatings, banishing, and even death.

Distinguishing between these senses of vengeance may allow us to understand that, while directed towards wrongdoers, a commendable pity is not felt for people who deserve their sufferings. In her article *Platonic Pity, or Why Compassion is not a Platonic virtue*, Rachana Kamtekar argues that the judgment of un-deservedness (i.e., the belief that the pitied subject does not deserve the endured evil) is an Aristotelian requisite, circumscribed by the scope of *Rhetoric*. Indeed, Kamtekar considers the possibility of instances where this Aristotelian premise is not necessary for pity⁷⁶. At first sight, Platonic pity, directed towards the wrongdoer, might seem to be such an instance where we may rightly say that pity is felt towards someone who deserves what he suffers.

Nevertheless, if what the unjust person suffers is the deformation of her soul (i.e., τιμωρία in its first sense, as differentiated from justice)⁷⁷, pity towards such person does not seem to be compatible with believing that their suffering is deserved. For it is not clear how, in the Platonic framework, one may rightly assert that someone deserves the injustice they suffer. Indeed, if we conceive the judgment of desert as a normative one, then claiming that someone deserves something implies an appraisal of the jus-

⁷² Plato, *Leges* 728c, 2.

⁷³ For a similar distinction, see *Prot.* 324b, where the sophist distinguishes the past-oriented vengeance from the reformatory and future-oriented justice.

⁷⁴ Plato, *Leges* 728c, 3.

⁷⁵ Plato, *Leges* 735d-e.

⁷⁶ Kamtekar, *Platonic Pity*, p. 314.

⁷⁷ Plato, *Leges* 728c, 3.

tice of that distribution – it would be the same as saying that someone justly deserves it. However, stating that such suffering is justly deserved would be contradictory, as the suffering is the injustice itself. Therefore, in saying that wrongdoers deserve what they suffer, their τιμωρία in the first sense, we would be stating that something κακός (suffering injustice in the soul) is καλός (insofar as it is just). Consequently, although Plato differs from Aristotle in admitting that judging someone as a wrongdoer is compatible with pitying them, this does not imply that it is possible to pity someone who deserves such suffering⁷⁸.

So far, we have seen that, in *Laws*, Plato preserves crucial theses that were also present in *Gorgias*. However, what may be considered a Socratic suggestion there becomes here a pivotal aspect of the good citizen's character⁷⁹. Among the traits that make a good man and that form the guarantee for leading a fine life, the Athenian counts a soul capable, as the occasion demands, of both righteous anger and pity. A person's soul should contain both an irascible and a gentle⁸⁰ disposition:

Every man should combine in his character high spirit (θυμοειδῆ) with the utmost gentleness (πρᾶον δὲ ὡς ὅτι μάλιστα), because there is only one way to get out of the reach of crimes committed by other people and which are dangerous and hard to cure (χαλεπὰ καὶ δυσίατα) or even impossible to cure (παράπαν ἀνίατα): you have to overcome them by fighting in self-defense and rigidly punishing (κολάζοντα) them, and no soul can do this without a noble anger (θυμοῦ γενναίου)⁸¹.

⁷⁸ We have commented on Plato's stance concerning two of the three cognitive conditions that Aristotle recognizes for pity. For an explanation of the divergence between Plato and Aristotle regarding the third condition (the belief about one's vulnerability), cf. Kamtekar, *Platonic Pity*, p. 316-319.

⁷⁹ Plato, *Leges* 730b-732d.

⁸⁰ While it is conspicuous why anger (*thymós*) may be the emotional expression of an irascible (*thymoeidēs*) character, it may be less clear why pity (*éleos*) would be the emotional expression of a gentle (*práos*) character. Nevertheless, Plato's notion of calmness is closely related to pity. Indeed, he mentions calmness as the appropriate response towards someone in need of education (*Grg.* 489d; *Lg.* 888a), someone who acted wrongly unwillingly (*R.* 589c; *Lg.* 867b), and as the appropriate way of responding to one's misfortunes (*R.* 387e; *Cr.* 43b). Moreover, in *Phaedo*, Socrates is described by the prison guardian as most gentle (*praótaton*), a trait that explains why he does not get angry with him (*Phd.* 116c). For gentleness, or satisfaction, as the opposite of anger, cf. Konstan, *The Emotions of Ancient Greeks*, p. 89.

⁸¹ Plato, *Leges* 731b, 3-c1.

Firstly, the Athenian asserts the importance of being irascible (θυμοειδῆ), since this trait helps in dealing with people whose injustice is not curable. This distinction between curable and incurable criminals was already proposed by Socrates in his discussion with Callicles in *Gorgias*⁸² and is addressed again by the Athenian, who compares the incurable criminal with a sick animal who must be purged from the herd in order to keep the rest of the animals healthy⁸³. The method of purging criminals from the city is to exert a combination of justice and vengeance upon them⁸⁴, if not to reform them, then at least to eradicate them from the “herd” of good citizens. Here we can appreciate the usefulness of an irascible character, which might help identify when it is appropriate to exert vengeance in its second sense (i.e., as a kind of conventional punishment that may not be aimed at reforming the wrongdoer)⁸⁵.

On the other hand, the Athenian recognizes that there are curable criminals. The man of good character should also identify them and act accordingly, as he must understand that:

[...] no one will ever voluntarily accept the supreme evil into the most valuable part of himself and live with it throughout his life. No: in general, the unjust man deserves just as much pity (ἔλεεινός) as any other sufferer. And you may pity the criminal whose disease is curable, and restrain and abate your anger, instead of persisting in it with the spitefulness of a shrew; but when you have to deal with complete and unmanageably vicious corruption, you must let your anger off its leash. That is why we say that it must be the good man's duty to be high-spirited or gentle as circumstances require⁸⁶.

Here, as in *Gorgias*, the involuntariness of injustice is explained by the fact that it harms the wrongdoer – because no one would willingly pursue the most harmful of evils. In this way, as we already have seen, the appraisal of the magnitude of the harm is a prerequisite of pity. However, the Athenian adds another condition that was not explicitly present in Socrates'

⁸² Plato, *Gorgias* 525b-d.

⁸³ Plato, *Leges* 735b-c.

⁸⁴ Plato, *Leges* 735e.

⁸⁵ To some extent, Plato seems here to maintain the relationship between anger and vengeance common in ancient Greece. Aristotle will go further, as he says that “no one grows angry with a person on whom there is no prospect of taking vengeance” (*Rh.* II 1370b, 13). Cf. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, p. 56.

⁸⁶ Plato, *Leges* 731c, 1-d, 5.

call to pity in *Gorgias*, namely, that one “may pity the criminal whose disease is curable”. Just as in the case of rightful anger, the appropriateness of pity depends on the distinction between curable and incurable criminality. The basis for this distinction is the magnitude of the crimes committed⁸⁷ and not the state of the criminal’s soul⁸⁸. Indeed, the criminal’s well-being is not Plato’s sole preoccupation in *Laws*, where punishment should serve both as a reformatory medicine for the wrongdoer and, for the rest of the community, as a deterrent from wrongdoing. Therefore, to be consistent with the two aims of punishment, an appropriate or noble pity must be grounded on an appreciation of the criminal’s curability, which leads to proper reformatory action in the case of minor infractions while leaving space for anger and vengeance towards major criminals.

The characterization of anger and pity as alternative responses to wrongdoing, and the corresponding demand of a double disposition in good citizens, resembles Socrates’ explanation of the guardian’s character in Book II of *Republic*⁸⁹, where the guardian is compared to a dog that is gentle (πρᾶον) towards its own people and high-spirited (μεγαλόθυμον) towards its enemies. Given how Plato considers punishment both as instructional and purgative in *Laws*, we may think of the good citizen’s task as analogous to the guardian’s task in *Republic*. Incurable criminals would deserve forms of punishment appropriate to the treatment of enemies, while curable criminals would deserve forms of punishment that tend to preserve their membership in the community through education. As anger and pity help distinguish these two kinds of criminals, Plato seems to attribute to them a significant social function in the city.

Moreover, in *Republic*, Plato conceives of anger as an active agent in maintaining the soul’s harmony and upholding its natural order. To accomplish this psychological role, anger must be directed towards an appropriate object and must preserve the judgments of reason. In her article *Plato on the Role of Anger in Our Intellectual and Moral Development*, Marta Jimenez shows how we may understand this redirection of anger from an outward-looking retaliatory emotion to an inward-looking reformatory emotion. This change in anger’s object may occur through cross-examination, whereby the subject becomes angry at his own ignorance, or through a subject’s acknowledgment of the weakness of their own desires. Jimenez quotes Leontius’ case in *Republic IV* as an example of a redirec-

⁸⁷ Plato, *Leges* 735e, 3.

⁸⁸ Cf. Mackenzie, *Plato on Punishment*, p. 198.

⁸⁹ Plato, *Respublica* 375a-376c.

tion of anger⁹⁰; according to that story, Leontius gets angry with his own eyes insofar they embody his unruly desire to look at the corpses of dead criminals⁹¹. In the end, Leontius' anger fails in keeping his soul in order; however, Socrates tells us that this example “proves that anger (τὴν ὀργήν) sometimes makes war (πολεμεῖν) against the appetites, as one thing against another”⁹². By finding its appropriate object – which may be one's own passions or an incurable criminal – anger can become a powerful device capable of keeping the order of the soul in check⁹³. Something similar may happen with pity, which must likewise be redirected towards its appropriate object, the curable criminal, instead of being directed towards people suffering apparent misfortune. In this sense, a noble pity – akin to the noble anger – may also contribute to the harmony of the soul, just as pitying the wrong people may disrupt the soul's order by creating bad habits and reinforcing wrong beliefs.

Finally, anger also maintains the order of the soul by preserving the judgments of reason. Being justice-sensitive without being entirely rational makes anger an ally of reason (ξύμμαχον τῷ λόγῳ, *R.* 440b, 3). This alliance is possible because anger can uphold the instructions of reason through the sensations of pleasure and pain⁹⁴. It is not clear what the exact relationship between anger and pleasure and pain is, since Plato does not offer a thorough definition of anger. Nevertheless, the close relationship between anger and pity in Plato's philosophy (and in Greek thought in general) enables us to think that something analogous may happen when pity is appropriately felt⁹⁵. In such cases, pity towards the criminal would be

⁹⁰ Cf. M. Jimenez, *Plato on the Role of Anger in Our Intellectual and Moral Development*, in: *Emotions in Plato*, ed. L. Candiotto – O. Renaut, Boston 2020, p. 303.

⁹¹ For a reading of this passage as Plato's rejection of the Athenian notion of anger, see Allen, *The World of Prometheus*, p. 251f.

⁹² Plato, *Republica* 440a, 7-8.

⁹³ Although Plato's description of anger in *Republic* occurs in the context of his tripartition of the soul, this partition need not be an obstacle for holding his remarks in *Gorgias* and *Laws*. In the former, we arguably find an antecedent of the partition, while in *Laws*, we find a laxer psychological model that maintains, to some extent, the *Republic's* partition. See L.A. Dorion, *Enkrateia and the partition of the soul in the Gorgias, Plato and the Divided Self*, Cambridge 2012; A.W. Price, *Emotions in Plato and Aristotle in The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, Oxford 2009.

⁹⁴ Plato, *Republica* 442c.

⁹⁵ These suggestions are not exempt from difficulties. For instance, we may ask where pity would be allocated in the tripartition of *Republic*. It may also be contentious to assert that Plato's remarks in *Republic* about *thymós* hold for what he says in *Laws*

aligned with reason's demands, supporting them and serving as motivation to act justly, while avoiding ill-directed emotions such as envy towards the tyrant or retaliatory anger towards the criminal.

3. Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that Plato's apparent rejection of pity is, in fact, a rejection of ill-founded pity. In *Apology* and *Republic*, Socrates challenges common Athenian practices that elicit a pity based on false beliefs and that leads to harmful consequences, such as perjury or disgraceful lamenting. As Plato's critique is not directed at pity per se, however, we may see how he leaves open a space for this emotion in human life. The second section of this article showed how, in *Gorgias* and *Laws*, Plato conceives pity as the appropriate response towards someone whose soul has been damaged by injustice. This assessment of pity depends on Socrates' reappraisal of what can be considered serious harm and his reassessment of what would cure it. By proving above all that injustice is a harm for the wrongdoer and that punishment is a benefit, Socrates shows the proper object of pity: an unpunished criminal.

In *Laws*, Plato adds a further prerequisite for an appropriate pity: it should be directed towards someone curable. This belief depends on Plato's twofold notion of punishment as both reformatory and a deterrent from wrongdoing. Indeed, in line with his account of the good citizen capable of bearing two apparently contrasting dispositions, there should be pity towards those who can be educated and anger towards those beyond cure. By postulating these emotions as alternative but equally appropriate ways of responding to injustice, Plato echoes a familiar opposition in

because, in the former, he speaks of *thymós* mostly *qua* part of the soul, while in the latter he speaks of it *qua* emotion. I do not have conclusive responses to these challenging objections; however, given the close interrelation between pity and anger, it would be sensible to think of pity as allocated in the same part of the soul as anger. Moreover, if we recognize the tripartite model of the soul as a metaphor for human mental and spiritual life, then we may think of *thymós*, not as a strictly discrete faculty or part of the soul, but as a way of speaking of an important aspect of human life, namely, that we feel emotions such as anger. In this reading, then, what Plato says about *thymós qua* part of the soul might hold for *thymós* understood as an emotion. Douglas Cairns defends this metaphorical reading of the tripartition. Thanks to David Konstan for raising these questions. Cf. D. Cairns, *Ψυχή, Θυμός, and Metaphor in Homer and Plato*, "Études platoniciennes" 11 (2014), in: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesplatoniciennes/566> (access: 15.03.2022).

Greek culture and suggests a possible way of understanding this desirable pity, taking anger as a model. In helping determine who is to be punished and in maintaining the order of the soul, pity can play a significant social and psychological role in human life⁹⁶.

A Noble Pity: ἔλεος in Plato's Philosophy

(summary)

This article examines Plato's remarks on compassion to show that his apparent rejection of this emotion is, in fact, a rejection of a kind of ill-founded compassion. In the first section, I argue that his criticisms in the *Apology* and the *Republic* are not directed to compassion per se, but to instances in which this emotion betrays false beliefs and is felt in improper contexts. Thus, Plato's criticisms leave room for an appropriate type of pity that should be grounded on true beliefs about harm, virtue, and justice. In the second section, I address Plato's remarks on compassion in the *Gorgias* and the *Laws*, where he asserts that it should be felt towards the unpunished wrongdoer. I argue that such a disposition to feel compassion appropriately—which I have called a “noble compassion”, akin to the “noble anger” (θυμός γενναῖος) present in the *Laws*—is an important feature of the character of an ideal citizen. Thus, for Plato, compassion could contribute to psychological well-being and social order. By inspecting the cognitive and contextual conditions that enable a noble compassion in Platonic philosophy, this article aims to contribute to the study of a crucial emotion both in Greek and Christian philosophy.

Keywords: compassion; anger; belief; Plato

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