

Essay no. 10

Introduction: a "Golden Rule," Really?

Zigong asked: "Is there one word that can serve as a principle of conduct for life?"

Confucius answered, "It is the word *shu*, or reciprocity: Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."

Reciprocity—such is the "Golden Rule" that has served as a guideline of conducts and social norms not only in Confucianism but also in many other cultures.

Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you—such is a way that sounds to enable one to live without much conflicts with others, the way of a "moral" and "righteous" man.

However, really?

Confucius told Zigong not do to others what he do not want them to do to him, but he didn't explained how can be Zigong sure that what the others do not want him to do to them is the same as what he do not want them to do to him.

This omission urges me to raise doubts against legitimacy of his idea of reciprocity to be called a "Golden Rule." Therefore, hereafter, I will point out underlying premises that Confucius swiftly made when he made such an instruction to his student, how such premises can be easily misused and how such premises make the Confucius principle of reciprocity become an imposing power instead of a moral one. This discussion will eventually lead to a new principle of reciprocity in a more acceptable and suitable way in today's society and challenge of the idea of existence of a "universal" moral principle.

Premises of the "Golden Rule of Reciprocity"

Confucius instructed his student: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."

His principle indeed sounds very decent and polite when it is carried out in conducts; however, there is two underlying premises which are much more questionable and dangerous than the words in a surface level. The two premises are as following:

- (1) You know what others do not want you to do to them.
- (2) What others do not want you to do to them is the same as what you do not want them to do to you.

Lying under these two apparent premises is one that is less obvious but is in fact inherent in the Confucius principle of reciprocity.

- (3) You know how others would like and not like to be treated.

While Confucius instructed his student, he kept in his mind to ask his students to take care of the others' values and needs. However, he was careless in indirectly telling his students that it is possible to know how others would like and not like to be treated. Confucius' instruction and its premises analyzed in other words is as following: others' values and reactions to certain treatments are predictable because they are the same as mine. The so-called Golden Rule is in fact imposing one's moral values and individual and

private standards to every other person and lead people to act in a way in which everybody is expected to have a universal morality which is the same as the one who is imposing it.

Such premises is very dangerous and has flaws in themselves; however, before elaborating on the dangers and flaws of the premises themselves, I would like to first substantiate some other kinds of “principles” that can be easily derived from the premises mentioned above. The derived principles has a more destructive danger than what Confucius said.

What Such Premises Can Lead Us To

Confucius only gave only one example of his principle of reciprocity. However, following the same line with the premises under his argument, there are two more possible statements. I will give examples for each of the two statements to raise doubts upon the appropriateness of the “Golden Rule.”

(a) Do to others what you would like them to do to you.

And (b) Others should not do what you do not want them to do to you.

A fairy tale from my childhood illustrate the consequence of one who applied (a) to his situation. In the story, a king encountered a seabird which could sing beautiful songs and immediately fell in love with this bird. He so wanted to satisfy the seabird and treated it well that he treated it with the best possible way in his kingdom. He put the bird in an elegant room and served the seabird with best foods, best entertainments, best facilities, etc. in his kingdom, just as how a king or queen is treated. However, the seabird got more and more depressed and wick. Finally the seabird died in sorrow. A simple story for children, but entails a crucial revelation that do to others what you would like them to do to you doesn't always work out as expected.

In this story, despite the fact that the king's intention is truly for the seabird's sake, the consequence of what he did to his bird is the same as strangling the bird into death. Then what he did wrong? He followed exactly what (a) says: do to others what you would like them to do to you. While doing so, he ignored that what others like is different from what he likes, as long as “others” and “he” are different beings, therefore inevitably with different values, desires, goals, etc. in each of their lives.

A controversy regarding cannibalism illustrates the application of (b) in real life problems. Cannibalism is rare—or more precisely close to extinct—in today's world; however, it is still practiced in some tropical and so-called “uncivilized” regions in Africa or central America (I do recognize that “uncivilized” is a biased word. But I use it here for now firstly for convenience, secondly for proceeding to criticized the bias entailed in the word.). While the practice is unacceptable in most of the other parts of the world where it is strictly considered as an act of murder, some tribes that practiced cannibalism do not consider it as malicious murder. In some pertaining regions, the geographical surrounding restricts their access to enough foods and for the preservation of tribal populations, they practice cannibalism and only when one is dead naturally. In some other regions, cannibalism is a part of funeral in which people consider eating of the dead is a symbolic and religious ritual for preservation of the dead's soul.

Criticism against cannibalism without any consideration of such beliefs and values behind the practice of cannibalism itself and complete opposition to cannibalism is an illustration of (b) in which the criticizer and opposing party is imposing its own system of value to the tribes that practice cannibalism and expecting that a standardized morality should be applied to all.

A belief for a universal value is dangerous. Imposing one's own value to others without any logical and reasonable justification agreed by consensus among different peoples is clearly a mental violence and a violation of people's rights to develop and preserve their own values which serve as a crucial part of ones' identities.

Dangers and Limitations of Confucius' Principle of Reciprocity

The premises summarized in short is that there exists a universal moral law and one can know of this law based on one's own system of value. As I have mentioned in the previous part, it may produce unexpected harmful consequences even if the intention is positive and benevolent and also it may be exploited by one to commit violence against the others by imposing a single standard of value. The most destructive and the worse way of applying this premise is perhaps imperialism which underlying logic is that the Africans also want to be "civilized" as the imperialist powers and it is the "white men's burden" to "civilized" those who want to be "civilized".

Of course, when Confucius instructed his student the principle of reciprocity, neither did he intend to commit violence, nor did he had a malicious or self-benefiting motive for doing so. In fact, he is trying to let his student be moral and serving the benefits and needs of others when treating others. Also, his principle of reciprocity is meaningful in that it seeks to establish a moral principle in relationships among persons. The word "reciprocity" already implies that there must be two parties interacting with each other. So, instead of an one-sided and didactic moral code, he proposed an interactive and reciprocal solution to morality.

However, the limitation of his proposal is that it eliminates the possibility of existence of different values and morality. After all, this "Gold Rule" is asking people to impose one's morality to others and after all by telling people not to do to others the way one doesn't want to be treated, this rule is merely telling people to act upon their own values and moral codes no matter who they are treating and generalized them into a "universal" moral law.

Reinterpretation of "Reciprocity"

Instead of Confucius principle of reciprocity, another kind of reciprocity, which is more tolerant of diverse views and yet maintain a sufficient system of human morality, is needed.

Maintaining the emphasis on relationship of two parties as Confucius did, reciprocity as I reinterpreted is firmly based on existence of two "different" parties. By different, I mean being two different beings with different values, desires, ways of thinking, etc.. Because different beings occupy different space and have different souls, they have different points of view both physically and mentally. Though different, in order to preserve cycles of life, individuals form relationship with various others. Not only there exist relationship between individual beings, there are also relationship between groups of people. Intricate webs of relationships thus develop and constitute a human society.

In this relationship, numerous trials of interaction and concession and agreements occur. People with different ideas of life collide with one another and when opposing ideas or values collide, instead of stubbornly maintaining one's own, people have to make concession and trade their ideas within the each party's sphere of allowance. With two different parties and a genuine relation, persons of different parties begin to reach a point where the two can both tolerant of each other and let the relationship preserve. This is when "common" value or morality comes into being. True reciprocity is not about practicing the morality of one's own, but about seeking for the common sphere of different morality that is acceptable by different beings through genuine interaction which must accompanies concession.

There are three things I would like to note about this reinterpreted concept of reciprocity:

Firstly, formation of common morality through reciprocity is different from dialectical operation in that instead of synthesis of two different opposing ideas, it is based on the two different beings that must preserve throughout the interaction, but a common sphere of values is found and agreed and thus

become common morality. Human interaction is more of a process that seeks for common morality, not a practice of a universal morality that can be defined with a single standard.

Secondly, one has to acknowledge the importance of existence of a different being while practicing reciprocal morality. If everybody is the same, “I” can no longer be defined because “I” must be the same with everyone else. In other words, difference defines being. Difference may cause to gaps, controversies and even conflicts. However, they provide a chance for more intimate interactions where people can seek for the common sphere.

Last but not least, the common moral principle found through interactions of different beings is not a constant one, but a highly dynamic one. Moral principle does not refer to the one that is only between persons; it should be applied to a bigger relationship, a society. Because interactions is always occurring in different levels and new common values found in individual level of interactions may influence the point of view of a bigger group of people and when different groups of people interact, they need to adjust their common value according to change in the point of view of one group.

Some may object to this idea of reciprocity with the accusation that it allows relativism and can lead to the conclusion that there is no definite morality, thus every idea can be justified to be right. However, it is important to note that the recognition of possibility of different values as being right doesn't mean that every idea, value, moral principle will be recognized as right. The interaction for reciprocity is based on relationship, therefore relationship must be maintained in order for the interaction and the seeking of common moral value to be found. Any idea, value, moral principle that destroy the relationship can never be recognized the common moral value. That is why intentional murder can never be right in any society in any era and one form of cannibalism that intentionally kills and eats healthy persons cannot and shouldn't be exempted from condemnation of immorality. They completely breaks down the relationship not only because they go over the limit of allowance of the others' values but also has the potential to completely break down the legitimate existence of others' being and their entire values.

Conclusion: Only “Common” Moral Principle

Zigong asked for a principle of conduct for life. Confucius answered with the principle of reciprocity. It became the so-called “Golden Rule”, the “universal” moral principle.

But I ask: does a universal moral principle exist in the first place? How are we to define this “universal” moral principle?

And I answer: the idea of existence of universal moral principle has led to more troubles than “moral” conducts and peaceful interactions. There only be “common” moral principle but no “universal” moral principle. Instead of not doing to others what you do not want them to do to you we have to what others like and not like first.

Such idea and approach to morality is especially crucial in today's multicultural society where so many values collide and to make sure that a moral principle which ought to serve the benefit of mankind doesn't actually harm it—under the name of “universality”.

Essay no. 25**Majority, constitutions and the creation of a democracy – an essay**

"A legally unrestricted majority rule, that is, a democracy without a constitution, can be very formidable in the suppression of the rights of minorities and very effective in the suffocation of dissent without the use of violence."

Hannah Arendt, On Violence (1970).

Introduction

Living in the 21st century, an age of not only globalization, but a slow – and imperfect – dispersion of democratic ideas and systems of governance throughout the globe (the examples ranging from the collapse of the Eastern Bloc to the more recent Arab Spring), Hannah Arendt's thoughts are just as relevant today as at the time of their publication. Is the formulation of a constitution a must for a functioning democratic society? How strong a popular consent must be to legitimize the formulation of decisions, laws, and even, a constitution? Can true democracy exist – is there even something which can be considered as a "true" democracy?

This essay will try to examine the elaborate relationship between three distinct concepts: majority rule, democratic rule and constitutional rule from a philosophical point of view. Beginning with the examination of the distinctions between majority rule and democratic rule, we will continue by analyzing two important questions of suppressive majority rule – whether the majority can rule, and whether the majority does rule. We will continue by questioning Arendt's thesis that a democratic system of governance necessarily requires a constitution; finally, we will examine what alternative guarantees may exist to safeguard the existence of a democratic society.

Defining democracy

In order to be able to examine a relationship between distinct concepts, Carnap would suggest to establish clear (and in a Popperian sense, falsifiable) definition of the analyzed phenomena. That brings us to our first question: what is democracy?

The modern usage of the word describes a form of governance where the power to make decisions in a society lays in the hands of either the populace as a whole, or in the hands of their elected and accountable representatives. Common usage of the word hence usually implies that democracy is the most inclusive and hence, the most ideal form of government – yet the word originally had a different meaning.

Democracy, from Greek "rule of the masses" originates in the ancient city-state of Athens, whose inhabitants used the word to describe their own form of government. Yet their system of governance was far from perfect – famously, the philosopher Plato condemned Athens in his treatise *State* for allowing unrestricted majority rule resulting in the execution of Socrates, instead favoring a state headed by philosopher-kings. The other great Greek classic, Aristotle argued that many simultaneously right forms of government may exist based on their level of inclusivity (kingdom, aristocracy and politeia), as long as the decision makers always act in accordance with the good of the state, not with their own personal interests. Should the latter occur, every government may become distorted – kingdom into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy and politeia into democracy.

Notice the common pattern of thought – democracy in both Plato's and Aristotle's usage refers *democracy as the unrestricted rule of majority*. Yet many people today would strongly disagree with such a statement – are they right to do so?

While the Enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau would have agreed with the definition, our modern concept of democracy however originates from his compatriot and contemporary, Charles Louis Montesquieu. According to Montesquieu, governments are only to be considered democratic – and by extension, he argued, ideal – if the state separates the three branches of government: legislative, executive and judiciary. If this separation happens,

then each of the three branches will constantly monitor the other two not to overstep its authority, and a stable form of government may be achieved.

Consequently, *unrestricted majority rule doesn't satisfy democratic requirements*; without separation of the three branches, the unrestricted majority (the legislative branch) will take over the other two, dissipating democracy. But is Montesquieu right when setting up such rigorous criteria for democratic governments? Why can't be, for example, the "popular republics" of the former Eastern Bloc considered democracies, by their own definition?

According to the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, *something is to be considered to be true when established as so by every member of a community*. According to Peirce, then, popular republics may rightly consider themselves democracies by convincing their citizens to accept their governments as so. Yet something seems instinctively off with the concept – wouldn't such an arbitrary concept of truth lead to the sort of dystopian society that is depicted in George Orwell's novel *1984*? (Don't forget that by the end of the novel, Winston Smith himself believed in the Big Brother.)

The answer is not trivial – but while detailing alternative democratic safeguards we will see that Montesquieu is indeed right by maintaining that democracy entails something more universal than simple majority consent.

Does the majority rule?

Having established the distinction between majority rule and democracy, let's examine the specifics of the sort of "unrestricted majority rule" that Hannah Arendt describes in this excerpt. First, let's examine the question from a practical point of view – *does the majority ever rule a society?*

At first glance, the answer would be obvious – yes, in the case of Athens, the adult males of the society ruled as a non-democratic majority (*Democratic here refers to democracy in the sense of Montesquieu*). Such a system created the sort of legitimization for the system that it required to maintain its stability – yet when we think deeper, additional examples are hard to come by.

For example, in the case of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler rose to power by obtaining 44% of the votes, then forming a coalition to achieve the support of the majority of representatives – yet it's hard to argue that Hitler's regime represented the majority interests of its citizens – even though he claimed to do so. The Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli argued that a ruler *must act as if they were representing the will of the majority* – but he deemed it counterproductive to actually do so. By extension, if we examine the non-democratic regimes claiming to represent the interests of the majority, we will find that they were, actually, promoting the interests of small elites – simultaneously claiming in a Peirce-like sense that they were the majority. The list of historic examples range from Nazi Germany to the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc – in practice, the term "majority rule" referred to a totalitarian regime. Even in the case of Athens, *true majority rule* is questionable – since in reality, political power often concentrated in the hands of the elected generals such as Pericles, who used his popular support to exile his personal enemies and assert his political dominance on the city.

Consequently, what Arendt states as the effective suppression of minorities by an unrestricted majority is actually something different – the effective suppression of minorities by a small elite, claiming to be ruling in the name of majority. That's called a dictatorship – not the rule of majority.

Even if we deny the part of Arendt's claim stating that the rule of majority can successfully oppress without violence, what about a modified version – whether dictatorships may successfully oppress without the use of violence?

The answer is, surprisingly, yes. Just as our brief mention of George Orwell's novel would suggest, the human mind is remarkably susceptible to extended psychological pressure, and propaganda – several members of the former Eastern Bloc had no formidable military forces of their own, relying instead on a "live and let live" approach, first initiated in the aftermath of Khrushchev's dismissal as Soviet Premier and the subsequent mitigation of the intensity of the Cold

War. In Peirce's words, the populace of these countries accepted their regimes as legitimate and unchangeable – leading to no or few use of violence, but stable dictatorships.

Can the majority rule?

Having shown that in practical terms, majority rule is hardly, if ever an actual political occurrence, the thought arises that it may be *a priori* impossible for a majority to rule a society. Let's examine the question from a theoretical point of view – *can* a majority ever rule a society?

To establish a political system where the political majority may unrestrictedly rule, the system must satisfy one of two conditions: 1) *Allow every member of society direct participation in decision making*, or 2) *Create a representative system which correctly represents the (still unrestricted) will of the majority*. Note the term representative: 50%+1 of the voter's preferences still need to be accurately presented to describe something as *true majority role*.

The American political scientist and economist Keith Arrow has long established that when considering any elective system of representation, the presence of more than two alternatives for candidacy will *mathematically exclude the possibility of a truly representative electoral system*, when weighing every vote at its face value. Setting the epistemological problem of whether we accept mathematic conclusions as decisive proofs for phenomena aside (and noting that even skeptics of empirical evidence such as the rationalist Rene Descartes would accept Arrow's thesis, given that Arrow's reasoning is purely mathematical), this means that in reality, *no true majority rule can exist*.

Hence given that every majority opinion is formulated as the sum of opinions of individual members, even Rousseau would have to accept that his *general will* of the majority can't be realistically created, since to establish true majority consensus, we would then need to establish the majority of majority, then the majority of the majority of majority, etc. in an infinite loop.

This consequently means that true majority role can't exist – when unrestricted, majority role will inevitably turn into the rule of the few, claiming to be ruling in the interests of many - just as Machiavelli has predicted. But what about democracy then – is it the *restricted* rule of majority? Is it something else? In the next part, we will examine Hannah Arendt's thesis that the restriction which provides the basis for democracy is a polity's constitution.

The role of constitution

Arendt claims that in order to successfully create a democratic society, the democratic principles of the state – principally, as derived from Montesquieu, the separation of the branches of government – need to be fixed in a constitution, or their restrictive power won't be sufficient. This raises two questions – what is a constitution, and how is it written?

Constitutions are, essentially, a body of basic principles which determine the frameworks of any society, regardless whether they are democratic or not (The Magna Charta, codifying the feudal system of Medieval England is a fine example of this). So constitutional rule simply means *rule in accordance with the basic principles which determine the frameworks of society* – regardless of whether these principles are democratic or not.

A fine contemporary example, paradoxically, would be the United States of America; while it was the country to first produce a written constitution which we widely consider democratic in 1788, few would be satisfied with that constitution today, disenfranchising women and colored people from voting. More strikingly, after the inclusion of the 13th Amendment to the American Constitution in 1865 erasing legislative differences between races, blacks were still heavily discouraged from political participation for a century, until the successful struggle of Martin Luther King in the 1960s – showing that a constitution may well be ahead of its time and contradictory to actual political practice. Another example would be the United Kingdom, which to this day lacks a written constitution – yet it is widely considered to be one of the most inclusive societies today, with a highly efficient democratic system.

Such empirical evidence seems to disprove (in a Popperian manner, falsify) Arendt's statement regarding the importance of the constitution – but what is it then, that keeps societies basing their government on the *rule of majority* that keeps this rule from becoming *unrestricted*, leading to tyranny?

The making of a real democracy

The answer to the question of democratic safeguards comes – ironically – from one of the first critics of democracy, Aristotle. His theory of morals suggests that in order to be able to function as members of a society, morals (responsibilities and roles) need to be practiced by every member; for a newcomer (like a child), this comes from the recognition of right as shown by elders and members of authority (like parents), and from recognizing the extremes of any virtue (e.g. in the case of bravery, one must recognize the extremes of cravenness and foolhardiness correctly). This latter is what Aristotle calls the application of the golden mean – a useful guideline for living our lives morally.

The contemporary Scottish philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre expands Aristotle's concept by stating that our individual responsibilities and roles derive from "narratives", character concepts learned from our environment – for example, students learn how to behave like students because of the examination of the existing student narrative. This in turn means that every member of society is shaped by the existing *tradition* of elders, and hence societal changes only occur when a narrative itself is changed by the participants.

This explains the failure of the 13th Amendment to effectively eradicate racial segregation – in the South, where the separation of blacks was the societal norm (narrative), meaning that no single piece of legislation could change the preconceptions of the populace, change had to occur gradually (by exposing whites to experiences with blacks, and a race-conscious education condemning segregation). It also explains the success of democratic institutions in the United Kingdom despite a written constitution – people "got used to" democratic behavior and that their representatives were accountable regardless whether it was written on paper or not.

These phenomena have profound consequences for the philosophical underpinnings of democratic societies. In effect, such societies are ruled not by the *unrestricted rule of majority*, which as we have shown will inevitably result in a dictatorship (as Edward Burke has famously argued), but rather by a *restricted rule of majority*, which, due to extensive democratic traditions in successful democratic countries, could be better phrased as the *restricted rule of plurality*. In such countries, voters and their representatives are well aware of the plurality of interests in their country, and even when in power, will act in accordance with as many interests as possible – in effect, leading to what Aristotle has categorized as a *politeia*, or a true democracy.

Conclusion

Democratic rule, constitutional rule, and majority rule are three distinct concepts, as this essay has shown. Democratic rule is what governs most contemporary Western societies – characterized by a *restricted rule of plurality*, based on democratic traditions and Montesquieu's separation of branches of government. Constitutional rule is something different – it means *ruling in accordance with the basic frameworks of a society* – regardless of the exact nature of those frameworks. Finally, majority rule was shown to be a *virtual* concept – inevitably leading to rule by elite.

Consequently, Hannah Arendt's claim regarding the lack of constitution leading to unrestricted majority rule, which in turn leads to the successful oppression of minorities and violence is flawed on two premises. Firstly, it is not the constitution which keeps governments from becoming unrestricted – they are the democratic traditions cultivated by the citizens. Secondly, unrestricted majority rule is an empty concept – for it actually hides the oppression of many by the few, inevitably leading to a form of dictatorship.

However, this does not mean that countries without democratic traditions are forever barred from becoming successful democracies. Just as in the case of the eradication of racial segregation, changes may very well come gradually – by successful education and frequent interaction, the tolerance for plurality may be established and a successful democracy may be created.

Essay no. 46

A tragedy, then, is the imitation of a noble and complete action, having a certain magnitude, made in a language spiced up by diverse kinds of embellishments brought in separately in the parts of the work. This imitation is achieved through characters, not through narration; and, through pity and fears, it accomplishes the catharsis of such emotion. By 'language spiced up' I mean a language with rhythm, harmony and song; by 'kinds of embellishment brought in separately in the parts of the work' I mean that some parts are worked out in verse only and others with song.

- Aristotle, *Poetics*

The definition of a tragedy from Aristotle's *Poetics* limits the term to a work of art. It has influenced the greatest of Greek tragic playwrights whose works Friedrich Nietzsche characterized as the harmony of the Apollonian and Dionysian element. Except the artistic value, the idea of catharsis allows one to ascribe ethical value to tragedy as defined by Aristotle. However, considering the post-Aristotelian art and history, one might ask oneself whether a tragedy should be limited to art. If so, should it be limited to a specific form and can its value indeed be determined by the quality and complexity of language?

Aristotle's definition of a tragedy insists on a tragedy being "the imitation of a noble and complete action". This implies that a distinction must be made between a tragedy and the actual action it is based on, which corresponds to Plato's idea that art is an imitation of the material world. For Plato, this reduces art to an activity of little value due to the fact that artists imitate the material world which is an imitation of the very essence contained in the realm of forms. However, knowing that Aristotle maintained that the essence, as something general, can only be contained in the being of which it is the essence, one can rightfully argue that defining tragedy as an imitation does not diminish its value since an imitation still represents the essence of the thing it portrays. Furthermore, this seems to emphasize the ethical value of a tragedy. If tragedy is seen as the imitation of a real action, then one can claim it truthfully represents reality. However, since the audience recognize the events taking place in the tragedy, but do not participate in them themselves, they are free to distance themselves in a way which allows them to bring the moral behind the characters' actions into question. Since the actions of the characters imitate the reality, this form of art allows one to question the morality of one's own behavior. Aristotle's definition demands that a tragedy should imitate "a noble and complete action". In ancient Greece, the playwrights obeyed the definition by designing characters who strived to a goal higher than themselves and whose virtues represented a set of ethical values one should strive to. Sophocles' *Antigone*, the main character of the eponymous play, corresponds to Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero. The play presents her struggle against legal authority which puts her life at risk. Yet, she puts herself in jeopardy in order to bury her brother and honor him in a way

she believes is right and when she dies, her death can be perceived as tragic due to the fact it resulted from a noble action motivated by autonomous ethics, resulting from the character's virtue. However, there are plays one defines as tragedies, but which do not follow the definition found in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliette* is defined as a tragedy, but neither Romeo's nor Juliette's actions can be defined as noble or motivated by a struggle for a cause as noble as Antigone's. Their death is not predetermined or outwardly inflicted and they do not display any prominent virtues, thus not corresponding to Aristotle's definition of tragic; yet one cannot deny their death causes emotion of "pity and fear" in the audience. This shows that what one perceives as tragic changes and Aristotle's insistence on the nobleness of an action is not utterly obliging when trying to achieve tragedy. The question is whether the term tragic should be applied to what people consider tragic now.

Having established that what is defined as tragic changes, one might ask oneself whether tragedy should be bound to drama - is tragedy indeed achieved through characters as Aristotle's definition claims? Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre insisted on shifting the focus from the characters onto narration, thus still keeping the form of a drama, but abandoning the typical style and structure of a play, thus disregarding Aristotle. Even though they are not defined as tragedies, the very intention of Brecht's plays, such as *Mother Courage and Her Children*, is to cause a reaction in the audience - to make them perceive something as tragic in the modern sense of the word and to question the ethics behind the actions they encounter in everyday life, but which the play exposes as clearly absurd and wrong. And one can, indeed, see tragedy in such a play. Even though the characters do not fight for a noble cause, the fact that they indeed do represent the reality causes angst and despair, fear and pity in the audience which question themselves. In that way, it is not the characters who are tragic, it is what one is shown about them, that is what one is shown about oneself. Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach* also expresses the realization that what used to be tragic changed as humanity became occupied with different issues, i.e. with itself. Written in 1860s, following the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution when humanity began experiencing an existentialist crisis, Arnold's poem portrays a new idea of tragedy. A man, reminiscing about "the sea of Faith" which "was once at its full", refers to Sophocles and seeks any sort of consolation for the realization he is left to himself, with no interventionist power above him. He does strive to a significant goal - the recovery of faith in anything in order to fight despair - which causes him to struggle, but he follows the values which he honors and finds fit to his ethics and the poem is the imitation of reality of Arnold's time. All of these things correspond to Aristotle's definition of a tragedy. Furthermore, even if this is not a drama written in verse with songs for the chorus, the language does have its rhythm and harmony. One can take this as the suggestion of the possibility of tragedy being achieved in genre other than drama.

Following this idea, Aristotle's definition raises the question of language and necessity of tragedy being bound to art in general. As it has been suggested by pointing out poetry as a genre which employs rhythm and harmony in its language, tragic style can be resumed in genres other than

drama. If one supposes that it is the mere skill of a writer which defines the language, then each genre becomes a plausible medium of conveying a tragedy. However, drama has a particular advantage of making the language come to life through the actors, thus allowing a better imitation of reality, which is an important element of tragedy. However, in my opinion, true tragedy requires no big words, but it does require a meaning to which one can relate, a meaning which can later lead to catharsis. For instance, even though it is written in the form of a novel, George Orwell's *1984* portrays a character which can be argued to be tragic. Living in a totalitarian regime with no freedom of either action or thought, Winston decides to disobey a set of values imposed by the legal authority because he finds them faulty, just like Antigone did, and strives to achieve freedom - a noble goal which puts his life at risk and indeed imitates reality of the human kind, as well as reflecting its fears and causing pity. However, the novel is written in a style more simple than Sophocles' or any other tragic playwright - what is important about the language is not the form but the meaning behind it. Ending with a simple sentence: *He loved Big Brother.*, this novel becomes a tragedy because Winston's "victory over himself", i.e. the abandonment of his moral beliefs and his goals equals his death and the death of a tragic hero, such as Antigone. If this is accepted and the meaning is seen as more important than the language, one needs to ask oneself whether art in general is necessary for a tragedy. Could reality not be tragic? Is the death of a civilian fighting for the rights of people in an oppressive regime less tragic than Winston's or Antigone's? Why does one need to imitate actions in order for them to become tragic if the only thing which is different is the language which is not as important as the meaning? If the catharsis is the aim which tragedy strives to achieve, could it be achieved in other forms or what is it about art that provides one with that experience?

According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, a tragedy allows one to experience fear and pity which lead to the catharsis, a sort of cleansing of these emotions. Having accepted that tragedy entails ethical value since it allows one to question the ethical values of the characters and oneself, one can accept that this also allows one to deal with other questions which arise in one's life. Dealing with those in a distanced manner allowed by the form of tragedy leads to realizations which would not have been possible in reality. Therefore, I would agree that tragedy in the form suggested by Aristotle offers the opportunity of catharsis. Friedrich Nietzsche saw it in a similar way, calling the Greek tragedy the harmony of the Apollonian and Dionysian element. If Dionysian is all that is irrational, reckless and chaotic in one, while Apollonian is its opposite - the rational, pure and composed, the union of those in a tragedy is what I personally believe leads to catharsis. If harmony is achieved and one comes to terms with different elements of oneself all of which are present in a tragedy - the irrational emotions which are imitated and develop according to the rational structure, which is predetermined by the playwright but does not negate the irrational - that is when one experiences catharsis and that is the advantage of Aristotelian tragedy. However, one could argue that there are other ways of achieving catharsis and coming to terms with oneself. Jean-Paul Sartre, French philosopher and writer dealt with

existentialist problems of human existence, freedom, angst and despair. Even though Antoine Roquentin, the main character in his novel *Nausea*, cannot be defined as a tragic hero, he can be taken as an example of a man who experiences catharsis without witnessing a tragedy. Roquentin struggles to come to terms with his own existence and the realization he is bound to exist and is, paradoxically, compelled to be free causes angst and disagreement within him. However, after hearing a song he loves, at the end of the novel he comes to accept his existence. This moment represents a sort of ~~cause~~ because Roquentin is cleansed of angst and despair and achieves a harmony which is what should happen after the experience of an Aristotelian tragedy. This shows that there are ways other than tragedy which allow the experience of catharsis, but these are reminiscent of what a playwright should achieve in a tragedy - a union of different elements which need to be reconciled. Therefore, a tragedy in Aristotelian sense is what leads to catharsis, even though there are other ways to achieve it.

It can, therefore, be concluded that the attributes which Aristotle ascribes to tragedy are not exclusive to that term. Other genres portray actions which are "noble and complete" and, since what is presented in a tragedy imitates reality, the reality itself offers a display of such actions. The language in tragedy is "spiced up", but that is also the case with poetry and it is not always about the form, but also the meaning behind the language. This also applies to characters - if they do not convey any meaning, they are not an honest imitation of reality. As for catharsis, it can be achieved in ways other than tragedy. So why did then Nietzsche think so highly of Greek tragedy and why do I tend to agree with him? It is true that all of the elements of Aristotelian tragedy can be found somewhere else, but there is no other form which unites them all and it is all of them combined and in harmony that allow the experience of catharsis, thus bearing utmost significance for one questioning one's own ethical beliefs and oneself and coming to terms with one's existence as such.