



# The Ancient Quarrel Between Poetry and Philosophy (Princeton Legacy Library)

*Thomas Gould*

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Affecting audiences with depictions of suffering and injustice is a key function of tragedy, and yet it has long been viewed by philosophers as a dubious enterprise. In this book Thomas Gould uses both historical and theoretical approaches to explore tragedy and its power to gratify readers and audiences. He takes as his starting point Plato's moral and psychological objections to tragedy, and the conflict he recognized between "poetry"--the exploitation of our yearning to see ourselves as victims--and "philosophy"--the insistence that all good people are happy. Plato's objections to tragedy are shown to be an essential feature of Socratic rationalism and to constitute a formidable challenge even today. Gould makes a case for the rightness and psychological necessity of violence and suffering in literature, art, and religion, but he distinguishes between depictions of violence that elicit sympathy only for the victims and those that cause us to sympathize entirely with the perpetrators. It is chiefly the former, Gould argues, that fuel our responses not only to true tragedy but also to religious myths and critical displays of political rage.

Originally published in 1990.

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