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Posture in Plato's Laws: An Introduction to Figuration on Civic Education

- "Posture" (an archaic form of "posture") is a central feature of dance, and of the Figuration philosophy of dance.
- Posture is also a central feature of Plato's philosophy of dance.
- For Plato, posture is part of dance education, which (along with the music) is the foundation of civic education.
- Plato's position on posture is supported by Figuration's concrete analyses of literal and figurative dances, including ballet, Appalachian clogging, Graham's modern dance, salsa/mambo (literal), and Tae Kwon Do, the pollen dance of the honey bee, "falling stars," and Neruda's poetry (figurative).

Purpose: The aim of the research was to determine the benefits of applying the new Figuration philosophy of dance, based in part on Plato, to civic education.

Design/methodology: A close phenomenological reading of Plato's *The Laws*, with a strategic focus on its account of the concept of posture.

Findings: Plato considers posture to be central to dance education, which in turn is central to civic education, as suggested by concrete analyses of dance based on posture.

Research limitations: Further studies on this subject are required in order to achieve a more nuanced and balanced account of the concepts of posture articulated by other philosophers and theorists.

Practical implications: More resources must be allocated to dance and dance education, in the interest of fostering civic education, and the political virtue that results therefrom.

Keywords:

Dance, posture, Plato, the laws, civic education

1 Introduction

"Posture" is an archaic spelling of "posture," valuable in this context for making visible the etymological connections that dialectically link dancing and poetic performance — by linking posture to posing to *poesis* to positing to poetry. Posture is a central focus of many conceptions of dance, including that of Plato in *The Laws*. Posing is the activity of which any given posture constitutes an interruption or end result, and it is often used as the smallest meaningful unit of a dance. It is also a fair translation of one of the uses of *poesis* in Ancient Greek, including Aristotle's word, *poiein*, for what a philosopher such as Thales makes or posits as the ultimate substrate of reality. (In Thales' case, this would be the *stoicheon* or "element" of water). *Poesis* is also, most famously, the word Plato uses in *The Republic* to discuss poetry as the most paradigmatic case of *poesis*. Thus, one can reverse engineer, so to speak, the posing of dance from the positing of poetry as *poesis*. My focus here, though, will be on how posture is of particular importance in Plato's conception of dance. Posture (a) is a condition for the possibility of the Platonic dialogue via the positive "disposition" of the supporting characters in the dialogue, (b) relates to the dance-connected figure of the puppet and (c) should be, as foundational aspect of dance, the primary educational goal of the ideally lawful polis, so much so that Plato equates dance education with education per se.

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The structure of this article is as follows. First, I will provide a conceptual analysis of posture as the first Move of the Figuration philosophy of dance, supported by Plato's analysis of that concept. Second, I present a novel description of posture formed by integrating this conceptual analysis with other conceptual and etymological analyses developed in detail elsewhere. The resultant Move, one fourth of the Figuration philosophy of dance, is thus the basis of one of the four pillars of the holistic analyses that Figuration can offer of any dance. Third, I apply this new conception to one (repeatedly employed) example from each of the seven families or clusters of dance. The specific members analyzed from each of the seven families will be, respectively, ballet, clogging, salsa, Tae Kwon Do, the pollen dance, falling stars, and Pablo Neruda's poetry. In this way, the fact that each of the four Moves offers different perspectives on each of the seven members of each of the seven families of dance can be observed. Finally, I will attempt to demonstrate the upshot of the Figuration philosophy of dance for the lives of individuals and communities, which is that dance (and especially certain kinds) is one of the first and most thoroughly restricted activities in loci of both psychological and political oppression—and is thus advantageously positioned to suggest productive standards for civic education.

2 Posture in Plato

Toward the beginning of the *Laws*, the Spartan citizen Megillos mentions to the Athenian Stranger that Megillos' home is the site of the consulate [*proxenus*] of Athens, and that he and his kin have a kind of natural "friendly disposition toward the city," and then Kleinias,



a Cretan from the city of Knossos (source of the Labyrinth myth), chimes in that his “family felt well disposed toward your people” (22, 23). “Disposition” is a form of “position,” which is a substantive of “to posit,” and “disposed” is the past participle of “to dispose,” which is a combination of the prefix “dis-” and “pose.” All of this leads the reader back to the two halves of the etymology of posture — posture and positing — here at the beginning of the *Laws*, whose central concern with posture is nevertheless more conceptual than etymological. Furthermore, this means that the two supporting characters in the dialogue, Megillos and Kleinias, are performing the acquisition of the same attribute, posture, that they are about to advocate for the citizens of their ideally lawful polis. In other words, the characters in the dialogue have taken the appropriate posture to conduct the dialogue’s valorization of posture per se.

Just below this passage, the dominant character of the dialogue, the Athenian Stranger, suggests thinking of all living beings as “divine puppets” whose “passions work within us like tendons or cords, drawing us and pulling against one another in opposite directions toward opposing deeds, struggling in the region where virtue and vice lie separated from one another” (25). The figure of the puppet recurs later in the dialogue in the context of an imaginary contest to decide whose art can bring the polis the most pleasure. “[I]t wouldn’t be surprising,” the Stranger observes there, “if someone thought he could best win by presenting puppets,” which is exactly what the Stranger predicts would happen if the judges for the imaginary contest were “very little children” (38). And the figure of the puppet makes a third appearance in the text when the Stranger again compares humans to puppets “for the most part,” and then immediately apologizes for “belittling our human race” under the influence of “the god,” probably referring to Apollo or Dionysius, whom I will consider more extensively below (194).

The puppet is relevant to my concerns because it is the perhaps paradigmatic image of controlled posture, insofar as the puppet is a kind of material potentiality for the puppeteer to actualize some series of specific postures. Plato’s analysis of the puppet also has a further connection to dance given that the figure of the puppet is often invoked as a metaphor for dance; dancers are puppets at the mercy of their puppet master choreographers, instructors, librettists, etc. On a more concrete note, one popular exercise for training dancers in proper posture, in which I myself was trained, and which becomes a critical aspect of the Stranger’s philosophy of education, is to tell dancers to imagine that they are puppets, with a string extending upwards from the center of the top of each of their heads, and that the rest of their bodies hang limp beneath the string. In other words, being a good dancer means being like a puppet under the authority of a superior guiding being (like an artist or a god); and being a good puppet is a good way of achieving the “fine” and “straight” posture imperative in a proper education.

Sticking with the theme of actual dancers, near the beginning of Book II, the Stranger claims that the chorus (for which, as I will show below, dancing was essential) is the gift of Apollo, Dionysius, and their servant-gods the Muses, whom the Stranger describes as “fellow-dancers” who have -

[G]iven us the pleasant perception of rhythm and harmony. Using this they move us, and lead us in choruses, joining us together with songs and dances; and that is why they bestowed the name “choruses”—from the “joy” [*charā*] which is natural to these activities (33).

Inspired by this speech, the three interlocutors of the dialogue all agree that “the first education comes through the Muses,” and accept the Stranger’s definition of “the educated” as “the one sufficiently trained in choral performances,” where the chorus is explicitly defined as “the combination of dance and song taken together as a whole” (33).

One aspect of this aesthetic education, the claim that “it’s necessary for the young in the cities to practice fine postures,” seems especially linked to conventional dance, whether one is thinking of the rigid lines of ballet or the loose flexibility of hip-hop (37). Further, reminiscent of Aristotle aesthetic test of philosophical fitness, the beauty of a posture is considered evidence of its virtuousness. “[L]et’s simply let all the postures...that belong to virtue of the soul or of the body (whether they belong to virtue or to an image of it) be beautiful...” (35) The more beautifully the citizens are disposed, the more beautifully they carry themselves, move through the polis, etc., the more virtuous they are. Put differently, the more beautiful a dance’s postures, the more virtuous the dancer.

If this interpretation seems like an exaggeration, it might help to look at the end of Book II, where the Stranger claims that “the choral art,” which is to say the art of a group of singer/dancers, “is for us the same education as a whole” (55). This seems to suggest, however counter-intuitively, that music/dance education and education per se are in fact coextensive terms. It might seem less counter-intuitive to paraphrase this by saying that the education of a citizen amounts to training them to perceive accurately and respond beautifully to, the rhythms of the community. At any rate, it is difficult to imagine a more intense valorization of dance. To show why this is the case, I will now offer an examination of the following four justifications: (a) dance is the best practical alternative given that complete stillness is impossible, (b) can have therapeutic effects for the psychologically distressed and disturbed, (c) can enhance the polis’ spiritual life, and (d) can minimize dangerous movement in the polis.

Regarding the first of these reasons, the Stranger notes that, since “every young thing, so to speak, is incapable of remaining calm in body or in voice, but always seeks to move and cry: young things leap and jump as if they were dancing with pleasure,” hoping for complete stillness is less practical than attempting to introduce productive order and control to the inevitable movement (33). And according to the beginning of Book VII, it is not only

children that benefit from intentional movement; on the contrary, “all bodies benefit from the invigorating stir produced by all sorts of shaking and motions” (176). For this reason, the Stranger asserts that “motion should be as continuous as possible” for nursing-age children (177).

This logic also leads us to the second reason for the valorization of dance, namely its benefits as a cure for madness.

”[P]resumably when mothers want to lull their restless babies to sleep they don’t provide stillness but just the opposite, motion; they rock them constantly in their arms, and not with silence but with some melody. It’s exactly as if they were charming the children with aulos-playing [a type of flute, often with two pipes], even as is done for the maddened Bacchic revelers, to whom they administer this same cure, which consists of the motion that is dance and music (178).

This therapy works, the Stranger explains, because “the motion brought from without overpowers the fear and the mad motion within, and having overcome it, makes a calm stillness appear in the soul...” (178) Initial motion, at least in the young and the mad, is unavoidable, but the exertion of additional, ordered motion can counterbalance that initial motion into a kind of stillness. In the case of madness, this overpowering “process incites to dancing... it thereby replaces our mad dispositions with prudent habits” (178). Note that posture reappears here in connection to madness by way of “dispositions.”

Now for the third reason for the valorization of dance, its usefulness in buttressing the spiritual life of the polis—dancing activities must be more than just ordered, they must also be sanctioned and sanctified by the polis, and defended against disruptive, creative innovation. The Stranger acknowledges, in line with the contemporary reader’s probable reaction, that this position is “frightening to utter” (185). “At any rate, this is to be the dogma about it: let no one voice anything or make any dance movement contrary to the public and sacred songs...” (189).

The fourth and final reason is the one based on reducing problematic movement in the polis. On the one hand, “every human being presumably moves his body more when the pleasures are greater...” On the other, however, “the human being who is more orderly and who has a better gymnastic training”—including dance—“in courage moves his body less” (207). The Stranger seems to be suggesting that in battle, it is fear which inspires excessive and unhelpful movement, including perhaps retreating unnecessarily, whereas a disciplined body helps a person move only to the degree that movement is necessary. This observation foreshadows my analyses of grace in *Elsewhere in Figuration*, for which aspect of dance an economy of movement is the sine qua non. The very next sentence in the dialogue provides a link to another area of my analysis, in this case of gesture, with the claim that “as the imitation through gesture of what is being said came into being, it gave rise to the whole art of dancing” (207). Thus, Plato is locating

gesture in immediate, and even causal, proximity to dance.

In addition to these analyses, other references to dance and movement in the *Laws* should be noted. In Book I, the Athenian speaks of four lesser and four divine “goods” (10). Of the former four goods, the second is beauty—which is intimately related to dance—and the third is “strength, both in running and in all other motions of the body,” which clearly implies dance (10). Additionally, of the latter four goods, the second is “a moderate disposition of the soul,” thus supporting again the claim of Figuration (via posture) is directly linked to the goods, both “lesser” and “divine,” of human beings.

Synthesizing these etymological analyses of posture in Plato’s *Laws* yields the third and final phrase of the amplified conception of posture for the Figuration philosophy of dance—*posture is politically-situated*. There is always a community, a society, a polis or sovereign state, under the umbrella of which human posturing and positioning takes place, and given that movement is inevitable, it should be recognized that it will always affect the political realm. Having concluded the analyses of posture in Plato’s *Laws*, I will now turn to the construction of posture as a Move of Figuration and its application to the seven members—ballet, clogging, salsa, Tae Kwon Do, the pollen dance, falling stars and Neruda’s poetry—of the seven families—concert, folk, societal, agonistic, animal, astronomical and discursive—of dance.

3 Posture in Civic Education

Synthesizing the conceptual analyses of Plato’s *Laws*, I now offer the following full definition of posture as the first of the four Moves of Figuration, my new philosophy of dance: the poetically creative, politically situated, dynamic imitation of stasis. To rehearse the insights elaborated above and elsewhere, posture is poetically creative because of its kinship to poetry via its character of positing reality (Nietzsche), it is politically situated because all movement takes place within a community with which it is reciprocally determining (Plato), and it is a dynamic imitation of stasis because both philosophical accounts of the world and also the world itself are constant activities that only appear to be a static collection of stable things or objects (Aristotle).

To relate posture to other theoretical discourses on dance, it is closely related to (a) Laban’s Movement Analysis’ concept of “Weight,” which involves the muscular tension of the body; (b) Maxine Sheets-Johnstone’s concept of “tensional” movement quality and (c) Suzanne Langer’s concept of that which animates the dancers as “dance-beings.” With regard to (a), in *Laban for Actors and Dancers*, Jean Newlove, a longtime student of Laban, offers a breakdown of his movement system. The chapter on Weight begins by noting that “Our ability to stand upright depends on the tension between the upward force of our bodies and the downward pull of gravity” (64). Thus even standing up, which appears completely still and inactive, is the result of a constant striving of opposing forces. Newlove



observes that this position, as with posture as basis of Figuration, “clears the mind and body for action” (64).

With regard to (b), Johnstone elaborates less on the “tensional” quality than any of the three other movement qualities, but this self-effacement is at the heart of the concept. “For example,” Johnstone writes, “the linear quality of any movement,” by which she means the way abstract visual lines are created by the dancer’s body, “does not exist apart from the tension required to project the line” (51). And although one could measure quantitatively this “amount of effort exerted by the body through muscular contraction,” Johnstone insists that “it is only as quality that tension can function in dance” (51). Put differently, the effort must be phenomenologically available to the viewer; the positing and posturing must be seen as such, as “the manifest dynamic of the projection itself” (52).

And with regard to (c), Langer claims that dance’s domain is virtual gestures expressive of virtual powers. “The spontaneously gestic character of dance motions is illusory,” she explains, “and the vital force they express is illusory; the ‘powers’ (i.e., centers of vital force) in dance are created beings — created by the semblance gesture” (175). Put more simply, dancers imaginatively imitate expressive movement, which creates the illusion that there are forces or beings, as it were, behind the dancers moving them like puppets. These forces are not a stable foundation for the dance, but rather the product of concrete, imaginative, mindful bodies.

To rephrase these insights in a way consonant with all three of these theoretical discourses, posture constitutes the “what” dimension of analysis, the starting place and material situatedness of any practice/discourse and its phenomena. The unusual phrasing, to repeat, is the direct result of reinvesting theoretical discourse with the dancing movement which is its origin, and an origin which it has heretofore hypocritically disavowed and fearfully fled. The presentation of Figuration is thus one-fourth complete, having found its (albeit abyssal) basis, despite dance’s trans-discursive nature, in its connection to the discursive art of poetry. Figuration, like all philosophies and discourses, needs some such basis in order to (a) endure through time, (b) maintain a kind of stable identity, and (c) distinguish itself from other discourses and philosophies. As for why these three objectives are desirable, Figuration needs to persist in being itself in order, if for no other reason, to help remedy the marginalizing of dance in philosophy.

The critical dimension of this aspect of Figuration for philosophy is its claim that anything taken to be completely static and secure is in fact a dynamic process that merely gives the appearance of immobility. I will now show how this critical function plays out in actual analyses of the seven members of the seven families of dance mentioned above. I will begin the analysis of each dance with the conventional or commonsensical usage of the Move then consider the two adjectival aspects and the one substantive core of the amplified, philosophical construct. In the case of posture, the commonsense meaning is posture or position, the first amplified aspect

is poetic creativity, the second amplified aspect is political situatedness, and the substantial core is the dynamic imitation of stasis.

For ballet, my example for what I have termed “concert dance,” the commonsensical account of posture leads to the obvious role of posture and position in ballet, which is the formalized “syntax” of possible ballet poses and positions. Most people are familiar the starting point of ballet, the first five positions, which refer to the proper placement of the feet on the floor. Posture finds ballet’s poetic creativity in the fact the carefully trained movements of the ballet dancer can be utilized to imitate anything (such as other animals, fairies, machines, gods, etc.) express emotions, and/or give the appearance of near-complete freedom from gravity in leaps across the stage. The political situatedness of ballet can be found in the fact that it arose in a highly patriarchal society, and reflects to some degree the various ways in which women have been trained, at great personal sacrifice and suffering, to be the visual objects of heterosexual men, and to efface their own physicality in favor of a reified image of perfect femininity. And dynamic imitation of stasis of ballet lies in the years of grueling training, the extreme brevity of a professional ballet dancer’s career, and the extreme muscular efforts required for any given performance of ballet, with its images of perfect and elegant creatures in perfect and elegant poses. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of concert dance in general, *according to Figuration, the posture of concert dance consists in representational/mimetic/expressive performances, which grow out of a tradition of patriarchal voyeurism, and which mask years of grueling training and physical suffering through immediate virtuosity.*

For clogging, my example for what I have termed “folk dance,” the commonsensical posture or position is of a rigid upper body with arms folded behind the back, legs always lifted high with bended knees, and constant effervescent smiles. Posture finds poetic creativity in clogging’s ability to create extremely loud and intricate percussion music conjoined with an apparent utter lightness through two thin pieces of metal barely separated by nails hammered into the shoes. Political situatedness can be found in the fact that clogging is the result of a fusion of dances created in politically disempowered ethnic and racial communities (Scottish, Irish and African-American) whose manual laborers, persecuted for their embodiment, forcefully pounded their bodies into the ground to make a unique music, while rising to lightness and happiness in the experience. And dynamic imitation of stasis in clogging lies in the apparently infinite energy and carefree attitude of the dancers despite the exhausting and extremely difficult nature of the dance. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of folk dance in general, *according to Figuration, the posture of folk dance consists in performances at the border between music and dance, which grow out of traditions of politically/economically/racially/ethnically disempowered communities, and which mask exhaustion through overflowing energy.*

For salsa, my example for what I have termed “societal dance,” the commonsensical posture or position is of an apparently simultaneously rigid and comfortable “dance frame” created by the bodies of two partners which are nevertheless relaxed enough to allow for the extensive and sinuous hip movements that accompany the basic steps of the dance. Posture finds poetic creativity in salsa’s ability to sustain in each couple a constant romantic and/or sexual tension that never (a) finds full release or expression, (b) spills over problematically to other couples, (c) fades into boredom and weariness, or (d) abandons the music that is its central inspiration and controlling source. Political situatedness can be found in the fact that contemporary salsa dance in the United States is a fusion of dances from Western Africa, especially-Muslim Spain, the slave cultures of the Caribbean Islands, and the United States (especially New York), and it is one of few aspects of Afro-Latin culture that has received significant respect and enthusiasm from Caucasian America despite concerns over the sensuality of the dance. And dynamic imitation of stasis in salsa lies in the fact that the apparently spontaneous improvisation of moves on the dance floor, often between strangers who have never danced with each other before, is the result of many hours of practice to learn common moves and train the body to guide and/or be guided by unfamiliar physical cues or “leads.” To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of societal dance in general, *according to Figuration, the posture of societal dance consists in performances of controlled social tensions, which grow out of the fusion of various cultures and subcultures, and which mask extensive training through spontaneous improvisation.*

For Tae Kwon Do (as taught today to children in the United States) my example for what I have termed “agonistic dance,” the commonsensical posture or position is of a constant tensed readiness to perform any of the various attacks and blocks of this martial art form. Posture finds poetic creativity in Tae Kwon Do’s ability to take a series of strategies originally devised for person-to-person combat and turn them into a method for physical well-being, flexibility, strength and self-protection, as well as psychological discipline and confidence. Political situatedness can be found in the fact that Tae Kwon Do was introduced to the United States by soldiers who returned from the Korean War having learned from Korean instructors who intentionally left out of their training the specific environmental elements which make the entire effort effective in personal combat.¹ And dynamic imitation of stasis in Tae Kwon Do lies in the fact that what comes to appear as an elaborate and elegant testament to stamina and self-control is only made possible by techniques extracted from life and death one-on-one combat. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of agonistic dance in general, *according to Figuration, the posture of agonistic dance consists in performances of violent aggression, which grow out of deceptive encounters between cultures, and which mask the fight for individual survival through socially beneficial personal discipline.*

For the pollen dance of the honey bee, my example for what I have termed “animal dance,” the commonsensical posture or position is of one worker bee hovering in mid-air, surrounded by a group of other bees awaiting her performance in order to find out where to find nectar (with the unintended consequence of accumulating and redistributing pollen, thus the name of the dance). Posture finds poetic creativity in the pollen dance in its ability to convey from one bee to multiple others the exact spatial location of the desired substance through manipulation of the three-dimensional space in which the performing bee hovers. Political situatedness can be found in the fact that the pollen dance only has meaning and efficacy if there is a group of organisms ready to interpret the performance of the first bee.² And dynamic imitation of stasis in the pollen dance lies in the fact that what has traditionally interpreted as a hard-wired instinct of the worker bee to “automatically know” how to make honey is actually the result of an elaborate performance and interpretation without which the nectar needed to make the honey would never be found in the first place. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of animal dance in general, *according to Figuration, the posture of animal dance consists in (especially spatially) minimal performances with (especially spatially) maximal results, which grow out of a necessarily social setting, and which mask animals’ intellectual adaption through what has historically appeared to humans as instincts.*

For “falling stars” or “shooting stars,” my example for what I have termed “astronomical dance,” the commonsensical posture or position is actually nothing at the moment of the falling, but is retroactively inferred to have been a position as one of the numerous stars, perceived as pinpricks of light in the night sky. Posture finds poetic creativity in the phenomenon of “falling stars” in the fact that bits of solid debris the size of boulders, caught by the gravitational field of the earth, appear to human observers to be objects which are in reality luminous balls of plasma as large as millions of miles across.³ Political situatedness can be found in the fact that falling stars can only be experienced, paradoxically enough, by politically conditioned humans in technologically minimal conditions — which is to say, a person is only told about falling stars by others living in some sort of political society, but can only see the falling stars from areas with little to none of the light pollution that accompanies politically-dependant scientific technology. And dynamic imitation of stasis in “falling stars” lies in the fact that it is only because humans cannot see the constant flight of the meteoroid before it is transformed by the earth’s gravity into a flaming meteorite that a brief fall from the heavens appears to have occurred. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of astronomical dance in general, *according to Figuration, the posture of astronomical dance consists in performances of mistaken identities, which grow out of a politically facilitated awareness, and which mask human ignorance through visual spectacle.*



And finally, for Neruda's poetry, my example for what I have termed "discursive dance," the commonsensical posture or position is the words on the page and the sounds heard by the human ear. Posture finds poetic creativity in Neruda's surrealistic transformation of language from a transparent vehicle of ordinary experience into a distorted tool that re-carves into the reader/listener marks which are structurally similar to the marks already carved into the reader/listener by the pulsing phenomena of the world. Political situatedness can be found in the fact that it was Neruda's embracing of communism as a political ideology that inspired him to return to the non-commercial values and experiences of the most ordinary aspects of his reality. And dynamic imitation of stasis in Neruda's poetry lies in the fact that it is only through revolutionary personal experiences that the words came to be frozen in just the way that they are now on the lifeless page. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of discursive dance in general, *according to Figuration, the posture of discursive dance consists in performances of language as a non-transparent entity, which grow out of subversive political movements, and which mask transcendent experiences in drab black and white pages.*

4 Conclusion: Figuration on Civic Education

I will now elaborate eight civic educational implications — four psychological and four political prerequisites — for any flourishing society, as suggested by the *Figuration* philosophy of dance. In outline, this latter exploration will consist in (a) identifying at least one non-exclusively-philosophical theoretical discourse with which each prerequisite causes *Figuration* to align; (b) naming one theorist in the interdisciplinary field of Dance Studies whose work considers the intersection of this theoretical discourse and dance; and (c) briefly suggesting ways in which *Figuration* might strategically benefit this theoretical discourse in its pursuit of psychological and political virtue.

What I mean by the psychological and political prerequisites for ideal flourishing — understood as necessarily inclusive of dance flourishing — are the minimum conditions under which it seems probable that an individual or a community could fully support dance. And by this I mean the absence of obstacles to, as well as the presence of facilitators of, every community member's ability to engage in dance practices of his or her choosing. One example of such an obstacle, and a common one in this culture, is a parent's decision that his or her son should not be allowed to dance because dance is too effeminate and might incline him to homosexuality. Another example would be the recent decision of a principal in Mississippi to cancel a junior high prom (and thereby prevent the occurrence of dancing) because one of the school's students expressed the intention of bringing her lesbian partner to the dance.

As these examples illustrate, dance, given its irreducibly social and political dimension (since it has to at least be taught by someone else, and usually at a business or

event in the public sphere), requires for its actualization both positive and negative sociopolitical conditions. Consequently, an attempt to construct a philosophy of dance from the scattered treatments of aspects of dance in the history of philosophy must address not only the theoretical or philosophical, but also the practical or political, prerequisites of, and obstacles to, the continued existence of its subject matter. Put differently, a comprehensive philosophy of dance, just like a comprehensive philosophy of architecture or sculpture, needs to address the materials used in its art, and the materials of dance include human beings whose bodies and minds are formed for the possibility, and liberated from the impossibility, of engaging in dance.

I will now briefly re-summarize these conditions for, first, the individual, and second, the community. For individuals, (1a) posture suggests that individuals perpetually move and change, and thus requires a psychological preparedness for change and capacity to adapt flexibly; (2a) gesture suggests that psychological health requires physical health, and thus requires bodily stimulation and discipline; (3a) grace suggests that permeability to the environment is beneficial, and thus requires the promotion of environments with which fusion is desirable; and (4a) resilience suggests that cycles and patterns will always be repeated, and thus requires a tolerance of repetition and compulsion per se, though not of any particular form thereof.

For communities, (1b) posture suggests that stability is a function of tolerating perpetual and shifting tensions, and thus requires societal tolerance at the fundamental level of human embodiment; (2b) gesture suggests that both nonverbal and verbal forms of linguistic expression are crucial release valves for bodily drives, and thus requires that society protect its citizens' freedom of both nonverbal and verbal expression; (3b) grace suggests that aesthetic flourishing requires an open and holistic comportment to one's borders, and thus requires that a society not compartmentalize and/or neglect the aesthetic aspects of life; and (4b) resilience suggests that, given that a resurgence of dangers (including dangers from within) is inevitable, a resurgence of protections against such dangers must be guaranteed for its citizens.

Abstracting from these eight prerequisites, in the interest of economy and mnemonics, and at a level for which the psychological and political are only negligibly distinct, (1) posture valorizes/demands tension, (2) gesture valorizes/demands embodiment, (3) grace valorizes/demands permeability, and (4) resilience valorizes/demands repetitiveness. Perhaps the best way to synthesize the sweeping claims of this final section, and connect them back to the overall goals of this article, would be to offer a sketch of what a society reshaped in the form of *Figuration* might be like. I want to begin with three preliminary observations.

First, given how broadly the concept of dance is used in this project, it should be noted that an ideally dancing society for *Figuration* would be one which danced in every aspect, and in every register, of its being. This means that each of the seven families of dance would

have to be actively involved. Therefore, the descriptions that follow will be organized around the seven families of dance. Second, although I argue for the relevance of dance at the very beginning of the larger project, and have discussed the potential benefits of dance at various moments throughout it, I have not yet made a case for the necessity of dance. Why dance specifically, instead of painting, or rock-climbing? Thus, the first half of each of the following descriptions explains why dance is necessary for the aspect of reality named in each family of dance — such as concert performance in general for “concert dance.” And third, many of the differences between this ideal society and the contemporary United States do not involve objective states of affairs, but rather intersubjective perceptions and awareness. In other words, we are already halfway there, objectively, to an ideally dancing society, but until the various dances that make it up are recognized, acknowledged, supported, and celebrated, the existence of the practices themselves are insufficient. Thus, the descriptions involve both alternative ways of understanding and appreciating existing dance practices as well as pragmatic suggestions for concrete change.

It is necessary that concert performance include concert dance because, firstly, it is always already necessarily there, at least insofar as any artistic performance requires the disciplined movements of the human body. This is especially the case even where it is especially invisible, namely musical performances. The rigid posture of the woodwind section of the symphony orchestra is nevertheless the tensely-held posture of a performer, and the passionate gesticulations of the conductor are more obviously so. This minimalism of so-called classical music performance also suggests the second point of this necessity, however, which is that the more dancing is explicitly involved, the larger will be the reach of the concert performance. In the comparatively more popular salsa band, for example, at least one of the musicians/singers actually dances salsa on stage during the performance. Though there is much disagreement as to which kind of concerts people should be attending, and which performers should be supported, it seems universally acknowledged that patronizing concerts is a good thing, and finding a greater role for dancing in those concerts would do just that. This emphasis on embodiment would also facilitate greater tolerance toward variously embodied persons along axes such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability, and thereby remove obstructions to democratic practices that could be based more on ideas and arguments than on irrational prejudices.

Although Figuration’s ideally dancing society might feature more concert dance, the kinds of dances performed would be more responsive to, and rewarding for, the interests and tastes of its communities than is currently the case. This is not to say that traditional concert dance, including ballet, would not have a place in such a society, only that such a place would occupy a smaller proportion of the total space allotted to concert dance as a whole (including in terms of community

funding). Ballet, for example, would become (recognized as) a more specialized practice, for a specialized audience, and be funded and supported as such. The primary difference, then, would be an image makeover, whereby the populace would no longer associate dance performances with exclusively so-called “high-brow” entertainment. The new concert dance would be to contemporary concert dance what rock-and-roll concerts are to opera performances, namely, the former phenomenon would remain more prominent as long as it matched the wishes of the community. This would, in turn, increase the egalitarian spirit of the polis by weakening the importance and privilege of class.

It is necessary that folk art include folk dancing primarily because dancing is already central to the folk art of most of the marginalized communities in contemporary U. S. culture, including hip-hop and jazz in African-American communities, step dancing in Irish communities, and disco and pop, among other forms, in gay communities. A greater recognition of the aesthetic value of dance would facilitate a greater appreciation for those marginalized communities given that they have historically engaged in dance, which would thus contribute to greater harmony and social cohesion among mainstream and marginalized communities in our society.

Figuration’s ideally dancing society would also be erupting with new and varied forms of contemporary folk dance, focusing on the new forms that are being created in actual communities today, such as reggaeton and various other hip-hop forms. It would also encourage a revivification of old and forgotten folk dances from all over the world, by recreating them for contemporary contexts and attempting to fuse them with existing dances. Perhaps competitions could be arranged in which neighborhoods and towns would exercise local pride and flex their creative muscles to celebrate the distinctive movement styles of diverse locales. This, in turn, would encourage community involvement and solidarity in the polis.

It is necessary that societal rituals, leisure activities and recreation include societal dance primarily because of the considerable improvement to both physical and mental health that social dancing can provide. This is especially true as opposed to the currently more popular varieties of formal social gatherings, such as hanging out at bars, playing cards, and attending parties and dinner parties without dancing. Most of the worst health problems facing the contemporary United States, including heart disease and diabetes, are exacerbated, and often even created, by obesity, sedentary lifestyles and poor diets; regular dancing naturally leads to weight loss, it is necessarily non-sedentary, and the enjoyment it produces reduces the desire and opportunity for comfort or emotional eating. And exercise regimens and stimulating social interaction are also frequently prescribed to improve psychological functioning and well-being, even among those labeled severely mentally ill. A polis whose citizens are physically healthy would be more productive and better able to flourish through major crises such as



natural disasters and wartime conditions. And one whose citizens are psychologically healthy would bring greater peace and harmony, along with more unimpeded decision-making, which in democratic societies includes decisions at the polis.

Figuration's ideally dancing society would naturally encourage a wide array of societal dances, including dances popular for each living generation as well as dances that went out of style generations ago. This would encourage a greater historical awareness and feeling of inter-generational solidarity (via the revival of previous generations' dances) as well as creativity (in the creation and fusion of new dances). The emphasis would be on a highly pluralized environment of clubs and organizations where people could try out various forms and experience unique ambiances. If all major social organizations, including churches, community centers, and bars, would be willing to incorporate some form of dancing entertainment into their schedules just one night per week, then this would be relatively easy to achieve. And as mentioned above, a polis in which more of the citizenry dances is one which would be healthier, saner and more harmonious, active, and effectively deliberative.

It is necessary that agonistic activities be understood as including agonistic dance for three main reasons. First, for a stereotypical athlete in a mainstream sport, such as a linebacker on a high school football team, understanding his sport as an aesthetic pursuit defined in part by its graceful movements would presumably increase his tolerance for, and appreciation of, other dancers, such as the performers in his school's theater program. Second, a greater emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of sporting activity could help shake up the current canon of sports, wherein team sports involving playing with balls are "real" sports, and anything done by individuals, such as tennis, or not involving balls, such as most gymnastics, is only peripherally a sport. This would also help break down the problematic gender dynamics of sports today, as women on average seem to tend to be more interested in non-orthodox sports (as currently understood). Third, this aesthetic understanding of sports could also be used pedagogically to develop classes in school curricula that teach sports by presenting it as a kind of dance, thus reaching a wider audience for the beneficial effects of sports, the members of which might be intimidated or turned off by misogynistic, homophobic and otherwise discriminatory approaches. This would of course contribute to the tolerance and open-mindedness of the polis.

Given Figuration's definition of agonistic dance, most of the activities that fall under this heading could hardly be more popular in contemporary U. S. society, especially professional and college-level sports. Thus, as already stated, the primary challenge here for Figuration's ideally dancing society would be pedagogical, teaching people to orient themselves to such activities as, *additionally*, forms of dance. This approach would obviously be beneficial at least in terms of improved physical fitness and bodily confidence, especially in regards to children in

the educational system. And, as Dewey famously believed, the education/socialization of children is the most effective locus for energy aimed at meaningful political change.

It is necessary that animal activity be understood as including animal dance for two primary reasons. First, it offers a broader and more secure foundation for connecting human animals to our non-human relatives than most existing strategies. In the case of language, for example, there are far fewer animal species that engage in linguistic communication (mostly just mammals) than there are that engage in dancing behavior (including even invertebrates). And even for animals that we can understand as communicating through language, it seems to me that it is primarily through their movement styles, or dances, that we feel the most resonant kinship with them. Think, for example, of the way a cat lazily crosses a room, while stretching, after a nap; does one not feel more connected to the cat while watching that behavior than when hearing the cat meowing in the next room? Second, this enhanced connection between humans and other animals would intensify our society's feelings of moral outrage at pervasive animal abuse and neglect, and perhaps even facilitating meaningful change.

Similarly to the case of agonistic dance, it is difficult to imagine, and virtually impossible to produce, more dancing activity in the rest of the animal kingdom, therefore Figuration's ideally dancing society would differ from contemporary U. S. society primarily in terms of an orientation towards animal life as dancing-being. The primary benefit here, as stated above, would be to help close the perceived gap between human and non-human being, thereby facilitating a more holistic, sustainable, and environmentally ethical relationship between that human society and the rest of nature. If we are more essentially (or at least originally) dancers than humans, then all of the other dancing animals on earth are members of our family in a much more resounding and meaningful way than we typically think. This would also encourage a more integrated form of human and non-human habitats, as the human dancers would presumably feel a natural longing to be surrounded by more of their dancing kin. Urban planning and architectural design in the polis could conceivably be affected as well.

It is necessary that astronomical activity be understood as including astronomical dance primarily because it offers a more effective way of making us feel connected to celestial objects than just thinking of them as made up of the same kinds of matter, namely by thinking of them as engaged in the same sort of activity. If the other parts of the cosmos, even those that are inanimate and light years away, are circling with their own distinctive patterns, because pulled by similar forces, then we have less reason to feel metaphysically lost and alone. When we dance, we engage our entire being, just as the planets and stars do in their continuous dancing. And a metaphysically-secure polis is one with greater stability, harmony and solidarity.



Even more so than agonistic or animal dance, the prevalence of astronomical dance in the cosmos is, probably fortunately, out of human hands. Figuration's ideally dancing society, though, would recognize more thoroughly this dancing being of the celestial bodies and celebrate it as such. The benefit here, as stated above, is a deeper sense of connectedness to the cosmos, which could do for the metaphysical angst of human beings what I have argued an awareness that animal dance is all around us could do for our sense of environmental isolation and alienation. This perspective would also presumably offer a more intimate and relational motivation for the study of astronomy and the rest of the sciences, since if even barren crags of rock and mind-bogglingly large spheres of plasma are dancers like we are, then studying them is no dry investigation of cold alterity, but instead a self-illuminating exploration of our shared being in the world. And a more scientifically-oriented polis, all other things being equal, is one better prepared to adapt in flexible and creative ways to inevitable change.

It is necessary that speech and writing be understood as including, and include more, discursive dance primarily because the pursuit of a physically-oriented virtue in a mentally-oriented domain facilitates greater mind-body integration and holism, which in turn contributes to a more stable, satisfying and aesthetically pleasing polis. Stable, because when the mind and body are in harmony, there is less disruptive and erratic behavior created by switching between conflicting actions motivated by the body and mind separately. Satisfying, because engaging in an activity dominated by mind would not require neglecting the sensibilities of the body. And aesthetically pleasing, because the more the senses can be involved and stimulated in our daily lives, including even our inner monologues and personal communications, the more pleasure we take in our own lives and create in the lives of others in our communities.

Finally, figuration's ideally dancing society would not only encourage dance as a topic for writing, but also place a much greater emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of writing and speech—not just in poetry, but in fiction, non-fiction and even journalism, political addresses and skillful conversation. It would also offer an additional incentive to the pursuit of abstract studies such as philosophy in the polis, given the knowledge that there is a kind of attainable grace and beautiful prowess to be pursued, not just alongside, but as an enhancement and perfection of, the dedication to truth.

Endnotes:

¹ An example is a block in which the first moves from being extended at waist level by a slightly bent arm to being held a few inches in front of the forehead at the end of a ninety degree bend at the elbow. This was originally an attack move in which the assailant grabs the opponents finger by their side and then snaps it upward to inflict great pain and render the opponent defenseless.

² This point presents a good opportunity for me to address the fact that I am using the word/concept "political" in at least two (frequently) distinct senses, that of "membership in a community" and "oriented toward the public good." I would argue that these senses are two sides of the same coin, in that any being belonging to a community is necessarily oriented toward the public good in some way, even if only in a gesture of renunciation (as would be the case with a hermit) or through attempting to subvert and exploit it (as would be the case with a mafia boss). Every member of every community, and therefore also a drone bee in a hive, is the kind of thing that it is only because of its community, insofar as it owes at least existence and socialization to that community, even if it thereafter rejects that community and/or pursues exclusively private goods.

³ That is, actual stars are as large as millions of miles across, so when a human observer refers to a meteorite as a star, that observer is attributing such potential size to an entirely different object, the actual size of which ranges from the size of a grain of sand to that of a boulder.

