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SOME HELLENIC IDEAS ON MUSIC AND CHARACTER

By LOUIS HARAP

IN PRACTICE it is not always easy to separate the technics from the aesthetics of an art. A first statement of this difference might be that technics gives an analysis of the internal structure of an art, while aesthetics treats of the relationships between the finished art object and human observers. The contrast is roughly between a study of the construction of a work of art and the enjoyment of it. The Greeks occupied themselves with both phases of musical studies—a fact that is not surprising in view of the prominent place held by music in the life of that speculative people. “Music,” said Plato, “is more celebrated than any other kind of imitation.”¹ Although not a great deal of technical literature on music has survived, enough remains to assure us that this study was deeply investigated by the Greeks. I shall not here be much concerned with their technical theories of the octave, modes, or notation. In this essay, which makes no pretense to completeness, I shall try mainly to set down some ideas entertained by the Greeks upon how the enjoyment of music affected human character, usually designated as the “ethos” theory of music.²

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As everyone knows, the earliest and most basic of all musical discoveries in the West was made by Pythagoras, when he discerned the principle of the regular proportional relationship between the pitches.³ The subsequent development of music would have been impossible without this knowledge. However, what is for us a technical principle

¹ Laws 669 B. All passages from Plato are from the Jowett translation, unless otherwise specified.

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³ Curt Sachs has argued that both the discovery of the scale and the doctrine of the harmony of the spheres were not original with Pythagoras, but that this theorist gathered these ideas during student days in Egypt. See Curt Sachs, *Musik des Altertums* (1924), pp. 16 and 49, and the same author's *Die Musik der Antike* (1928), in *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft*, edited by E. Bücken, pp. 3-4.

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of music was to Pythagoras the primary metaphysical fact about the world. The Milesian philosophers, Anaximander and Anaximenes, had bequeathed to Pythagoras the problem of accounting for the existence of an ordered world in the midst of conflict and opposition. Pythagoras tried to solve the problem by the principle of harmony (*ἁρμονία*). By experimenting with a musical string he had discovered that the pitch intervals of the octave, the fourth and the fifth were related in a regular ratio. In other words, high and low pitches were resolved in an "attunement" (*ἁρμονία*) that resolved their opposition, for each was related to the other in due measure. Pythagoras reasoned analogously from this example of numerical regularity to everything else, and he thought harmony was the clue to an explanation of the world.⁴ Human life, to be properly healthful and ordered, should also be harmonious. The relations of elements in life, both internal and external to the individual, must make a "healthful music," as Hamlet says. For the soul, if it is healthful, is attuned to the harmony made by the heavenly bodies. This is the famous idea of the "harmony of the spheres," which does not, as is popularly supposed, denote the music made by the motion of all the heavenly bodies in concert. This is a much later development than Pythagoras. The earlier astronomy permitted only a crude, limited conception of the heavens (for example, the sun and moon were not thought to be "spheres," but circles) and the harmony of the spheres is rather a condition of the soul, so that it vibrates sympathetically with the fourth, fifth and octave given out by the heavenly circles in their motion.⁵

Music and mathematics, because they presented the soul with pure instances of harmony, were held by Pythagoras to have purgative effects. He was the first among philosophers to expound the idea of catharsis, which had been transmitted to him through the Orphicism in his religious background. The idea of catharsis by music was present in the ancient tradition that Orpheus with his lute calmed beasts and that Amphion moved the stones with his music. The *καθαρμοί*, rites of purification by enthusiasm, were regularly practised in the Orphic religions as a means of releasing the soul from its bodily tomb. Pythagoras carried this idea further in prescribing appropriate music for each specific type of mental disturbance, and in his doctrine of the harmony of the "circles." Iamblichus relates that "Pythagoras was likewise of opinion

⁴ It should not be necessary to remind the reader that harmony signified to the Greeks a linear series of pitches, and not a simultaneous concord.

⁵ Cf. J. Burnet, "Early Greek Philosophy", 3rd ed., pp. 110, 306 ff., and his article, "Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism" in Hastings' "Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics", vol. X, p. 528.

that music contributed greatly to health, if it was used in an appropriate manner. . . . And he called the medicine which is obtained through music by the name of purification. . . . But he employed such a melody as this during the vernal seasons. . . . And there are certain melodies devised as remedies against the passions of the soul, and also against despondency and lamentation, which Pythagoras invented as things that afford the greatest assistance in these maladies.”⁶ After specifying more of these remedies, Iamblichus concludes that “after this manner, therefore, Pythagoras through music produced the most beneficial correction of human manners and lives.”⁷ Pythagoras believed that the hearing of sounds which bore certain arithmetical relationships had a powerful and quite specific effect on the soul. The movements in each piece of music produced similar movements in the soul. Since desirable states of the soul could be induced by suitable music, it assumed great importance for moral life. Pythagoras had finally deepened the primitive conception of purification by music when he founded it upon a universal metaphysical theory of harmony.

As might have been expected, his followers developed in two directions. Some of them became absorbed in his mathematical theory of music, while others were preoccupied with the ethos theory of the effect of music upon character. Among the earliest of the former was Lasos, one of the seven sages, who was said to have been the instructor of Pindar in lyric composition and a composer as well as a theoretician. He was the first Greek to write on music, establishing in writing the theoretical system of Greek music and giving definitive form to its technical vocabulary; and he was perhaps the founder of notation for vocal music.⁸ On the side of the ethos-theory the outstanding exponent was Damon the Athenian, a friend of Socrates and also of Pericles, and thus in a good position to gain a wide hearing for his ideas. It was Damon who laid down a prohibition of the aulos, because he thought the ethical effects of the cither and lyre to be superior to the relaxing influence of the aulos. He gave to Pythagorean ethical teachings on music their standard form and carried out their implications for the life of the community. The political and social significance of music was emphasized by him for, according to Plato, Damon said, “that when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the state always change

⁶ Iamblichus, “Life of Pythagoras”, trans. by Thomas Taylor (1818), ch. XXV, pp. 80-82.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁸ On Lasos see F. A. Gevaert and J. C. Vollgraf, *Les Problèmes Musicaux d'Aristote* (1903), pp. 103-107.

with them.”⁹ He also exerted great influence upon Greek education by elaborating the relation of melody, rhythm,¹⁰ and tone quality to the dispositions of the soul. Damon’s articulation of the ethos-theory and his emphasis upon the political aspect of music form the basis of these ideas in Plato and Aristotle.

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Of all the adherents to the view that music influences character Plato was the most severe and uncompromising. He states in its extreme form the view that the beautiful in music is an imitation of the virtuous. “And not to be tedious,” he said decisively, “let us say that the figures and melodies which are expressive of virtue of soul or body, or of images of virtue, are without exception good, and those which are expressive of vice are the reverse of good.”¹¹ The ethical element in Plato’s use of *καλός* as the “beautiful” dominates in this passage. In other words, beauty in music depends on ethos, or the character it expresses. For the ethos-theory is based on the view that music directly and precisely imitates human dispositions, because of the similarities of movement in music and in the soul. The Greeks conceived of the soul as being in motion when affectively alive (hence the term “emotion”). Plato said that melody has “movements akin to the revolutions of the soul within us.”¹² The musician must know, relative to “harmonies,” what are “the affections corresponding to them in the movements of the human body, which when measured by numbers ought, as they say, to be called rhythms and measures.”¹³ Melodies express the virtues of the soul and body or their vices.¹⁴ “Everyone will admit,” Plato affirmed, “that musical compositions are all imitative and representative.”¹⁵

If we consider as a whole all the scattered passages on the ethos-theory in Plato, we find that the musical motion which is a reconstruction of the soul’s movement is not simple, but the resultant of several simultaneous motions. It is not only the tonal movement from one note to another, that is, the melody, that Plato regarded as determining the ethical character of music, but also rhythm, tempo and tone-quality of

⁹ “Republic” 424 C.

¹⁰ Cf. “Republic” 400 B-C.

¹¹ “Laws”, 655 B.

¹² “Timaeus” 47 D, trans. A. E. Taylor. Cf. also “Laws” 790 C f.

¹³ “Philebus” 17 D.

¹⁴ “Laws” 655 B. Cf. also 789 D.

¹⁵ “Laws” 668 B.

the instrument. Hermann Abert has given the name *Gesamtethos* to this resultant ethical character of music in a work indispensable for the understanding of this entire subject.¹⁶ Of this resultant ethos, rhythm and melody are the chief, but not total, constituents. The melodic aspect of music is comprehended by the modal system. Some of the Greeks believed that each mode expressed the dominant national character of the states in which they were prevalent, and the modes were duly named after the localities of their presumed origin—Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Ionian and Aeolian.¹⁷ All of these modes finally became familiar in Athens, much to the distress of the defenders of the ancient Dorian mode, which was, according to Plato, “the true Hellenic mode, . . . which is a harmony of words and deeds.”¹⁸ To this mode was attributed the cardinal Greek virtue of temperance, and the temperament of the ideal citizen finds expression in it. The Phrygian mode manifests courage and is useful when citizens need to ward off dangers to themselves and to the republic. These two, the Dorian and Phrygian, are alone worthy to be retained in Plato’s ideal state.¹⁹ Plato is peculiar among the ancients in thus regarding the Phrygian as the mode of courage, for all others characterized it as the enthusiastic, orgiastic mode. Aristotle specially criticizes Plato for retaining the Phrygian mode while rejecting the aulos, “for the Phrygian is to the modes what the flute [aulos] is to musical instruments—both of them are exciting and emotional.”²⁰ It may be, however, that Plato’s “Phrygian” was a different mode from the one Aristotle knew by that name, and one of an older system. Plato completely rejects the other modes, for they are “relaxed” and debilitating. The Lydian mode is melancholy, expressive of sorrow and lamentation; the Ionian has the quality of softness and indolence and accompanies drunkenness.²¹

Rhythm, as well as melody, contributed to the total ethos of a composition, and hence rhythm must be consonant with the melody in disposition. For this reason Plato enjoins care in the selection of songs appropriate for men and women, respectively, saying that the state

¹⁶ Hermann Abert, *Die Lehre vom Ethos in der Griechischen Musik*, Leipzig, 1899.

¹⁷ But see “Oxford History of Music”, Introductory Volume (1929), p. 11.

¹⁸ “Laches” 188 D, 193 D.

¹⁹ “Republic” 399 A f., “Laws” 660 A.

²⁰ Aristotle, “Politics”, tr. Jowett, 1342 b 2-3.

²¹ “Republic” 398 C. For an extended discussion of the ethical character of the modes see Abert, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-100; A. Gevaert, *Histoire et Théorie de la Musique de l'Antiquité* (1875), Vol. I, pp. 178-199.

"must assign to them their proper melodies and rhythms."²² The tempo (*ἄγωγή*) is another constituent of the total ethos of music.²³ Plato reports that Damon "appeared to praise or censure the movement [tempo, *ἄγωγή*] of the foot as much as the rhythm; or perhaps a combination of these two, for I am not certain what he meant."²⁴ It will be noticed that rhythm is here sharply distinguished from tempo, showing a high degree of sophistication in musical theory. And to these factors which together make up the final ethos of music, the tone-quality of instruments must be added. Plato was so severe as to condemn purely instrumental music because its ethos could not be unequivocally known in the absence of a discursive text.²⁵ The aulos, at any rate, is definitely known to have an indubitably bad ethos, and is completely to be forbidden, as Plato affirms,²⁶ following Damon. The simple lyre and harp may be used (although not apart from a text or a dance, we may assume), for at least they are not intrinsically luxurious instruments.²⁷

In view of this belief in the powerful and direct effects which music produced upon character, the Greeks naturally were careful to prescribe the part that music was to play in education. It should be noted that Plato, and others like him tinged with Pythagoreanism, conceived of music not only as the special art of sound, but also in a wider sense as a generic means of producing harmony and proportion, toward which end the art of sound loomed large. Poetry, singing, and dancing were "musical" arts. In Plato's scheme of education, music, in this broader meaning, was to train the soul to a sense of proportion, while a harmonious state of the body is achieved through the second main part of education, gymnastic. This was probably the usual Greek conception of music, for we find Protagoras, in the dialogue of Plato named after him, recommending musical education, in the large sense, for the young, to make the proper "harmonies and rhythms quite familiar to the children's souls, in order that they may learn to be more gentle, and harmonious, and rhythmical, and so more fitted for speech and action."²⁸ Plato laid down very strict regulations in the musical education of the

²² "Laws" 802 D. Cf. also "Laws" 669 B f.

²³ This was first pointed out by Abert, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

²⁴ "Republic" 400 C.

²⁵ "Laws" 669 C f. This problem does not seem to have troubled Aristotle. Though he recognizes that "music, even if it is unaccompanied by words, yet has character," ("Problemata" 919 b 27) he seems not to have feared the risk involved in purely instrumental music.

²⁶ "Republic" 399 C.

²⁷ "Republic" 399 D-E.

²⁸ "Protagoras" 326 B.

young. In the "Republic" (Books II and III) he expounds at length the details of a rigid censorship of poetry and music, and reverts to the subject in the "Laws" (797 ff.). Music is to habituate children to harmonies and states of mind favorable to the conservation of the republic: children are educated in music that they "may not be habituated to feel joy and sorrow in a manner at variance with the law, but may rather follow the law."²⁹

Although the same ethical principles apply to music both in the wide and narrow senses, our main concern here is with their application to the art of sound. Because the influence of music on character is so great, this art must be regulated not only for children, but for citizens of all ages. "Melody," wrote Plato, in a Pythagorean vein, "with its movements akin to the revolutions of the soul within us, has been given by the Muses to him who uses their company with understanding, not for foolish pleasure, which is thought to-day its function, but as an ally for the revolutions of the soul within us that has been put out of tune, to bring it back to order and consonance with itself. Rhythm also was granted us to the same end."³⁰ This therapeutic function of music is not as prominent in Plato as that of reinforcing temperance and civic virtue. The soft, sweet and melancholy airs in the Ionian modes, for instance, conduce to effeminacy and thus weaken the fighting spirit of the warriors.³¹ Musical innovation is dangerous to the state because the spirit of license introduced by innovation "imperceptibly penetrates into manners and customs" and leads progressively to a degree of lawlessness that finally undermines the state.³² Classic simplicity of melody and rhythm must be preserved. Plato protests against the increasing complexities of rhythm and melody then being introduced into Greek music, for such complexity engenders license and disease of the soul.³³



The uncompromising aspect assumed by the ethos-theory in Plato becomes considerably softened when subjected to the less ardent mind of Aristotle. We shall see that the latter departs from the Platonic view in assigning a self-sufficient value to serious music. Though Aristotle's

²⁹ "Laws" 659 D.

³⁰ "Timaeus" 47 D, trans. A. E. Taylor.

³¹ "Republic" 411 A-D.

³² "Republic" 423 B f. Cf. also Laws 700 C, 797 D f.

³³ "Republic" 404 E. Cf. also 399 B, 400 E.

technical knowledge of music was greater than that of his master, he follows Plato closely enough for a long way. Music, for Aristotle, was a form of imitation. "Rhythm and melody," he wrote, "supply imitations of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance, and of all the qualities contrary to these, and of the other qualities of character."³⁴ This is reaffirmed in the "Problemata" which, if not by Aristotle himself, is undoubtedly Aristotelian. The movement to which sound gives rise "resembles moral character both in the rhythms and in the melodic disposition of the high and low notes."³⁵ The ethos-theory, that is, music as an imitation of character, is then the particular form which the imitation takes in the case of the art of sound. According to Aristotle the modes are of three kinds: the ethical (ἠθικὰ), representing the feeling which accompanies a moral decision; the active (πρακτικά), which incites to overt action, as in military music, or represents overt actions somewhat in the manner of program music; and the enthusiastic (ενθουσιαστικά), the mode of extreme agitation, which is homeopathically administered as a purgative to excited persons.³⁶ Besides the melodic mode, rhythm too has an affinity to human character,³⁷ as also do musical instruments.³⁸ Aristotle urges special care upon the dramatist that his music be appropriate to the character expressed in the poetic text,³⁹ just as Plato says of the music to be allowed in his "Republic" that "the melody and rhythm will depend on the words."⁴⁰ And like him, Aristotle too regards the Dorian mode as producing "a moderate and settled temper, which appears to be the peculiar effect of the Dorian."⁴¹ The effects of the relaxed modes are debilitating, while other modes, like the Phrygian, are excited and have a purgative effect.

When Aristotle comes to name the legitimate uses to which he believes music can be put, the difference in their views stands out. Aristotle declares himself to be in substantial agreement with "philosophers," probably Plato and Damon, among others, on the rôle of music in education.⁴² The Dorian mode is particularly fitted to the education of

³⁴ "Politics" 1340 a 19-23. All citations from Aristotle are taken from the Oxford translation of his works.

³⁵ "Problemata" 919 b 33-34.

³⁶ "Politics" 1341 b 33-35. This classification is continued by the Aristoxenians. Cleonides (pseudo-Euclid) notes the three styles as hesychastic, systaltic and diastaltic.

³⁷ "Politics" 1340 a 19.

³⁸ "Politics" 1341 a 21-23.

³⁹ "Problemata", ch. XIX, 48, 922 b 10 f.

⁴⁰ "Republic" 398 C.

⁴¹ "Politics" 1340 b 3-4.

⁴² "Politics" 1340 b 5-6.

the young because it is the mean between the relaxed Lydian and the excited Phrygian, and the mean in all aspects of life promotes virtue.⁴³ And "music has the power of character, and should therefore be introduced into the education of the young."⁴⁴ Habituation to true and virtuous pleasures that results from training in the right music makes it a powerful weapon for education. From this point on, however, Aristotle goes beyond Plato. He held that music taught in youth cultivates the taste for music to be fully enjoyed in maturity.⁴⁵ He also grants that enthusiastic music has a proper function as catharsis; "for feelings such as pity and fear, or again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all."⁴⁶ Purgation of this excess in emotional life Aristotle considered entirely proper, not only in music, but in tragedy as well. He saw all orders of life on their own terms and dealt with them accordingly, while for Plato every aspect of life was subordinated to the transcendent ideal of philosophic vision. The earlier Plato tended to ignore common needs and in large measure condemned those activities that did not directly promote the life of vision.⁴⁷ Although Plato does admit the cathartic function of music in a Pythagorean passage ("Timaeus" 47 E), this admission is an isolated one. Otherwise he forbids the exciting music of the aulos, while Aristotle deals differently with this question. There is a "proper time" for playing the aulos, "when the performance aims not at instruction, but at the relief of the passions."⁴⁸ In other words, this use of the music of the aulos is just what we found in Pythagoras: a homeopathic treatment of an agitated emotional state by orgiastic music.

Besides the use of music for education and for catharsis, Aristotle notes its function as relaxation and recreation, which, we conjecture, must have meant to the Greeks what amusement, as contrasted with serious art, means to us. Plato also approves of amusement, if nothing of importance is involved. But as usual Aristotle goes farther than Plato when the former permits "perverted melodies and highly strung and unnaturally coloured melodies" for the relaxation of mechanics and laborers who, owing to their lack of education, cannot enjoy the ethical

⁴³ Plato, as we may recall, preferred the Dorian because he thought it the mode of temperance, the Platonic equivalent to the Aristotelian mean.

⁴⁴ "Politics" 1340 b 11-12.

⁴⁵ "Politics" 1339 a 25 f.

⁴⁶ "Politics" 1342 a 5-7.

⁴⁷ This view is somewhat mitigated by Plato in his "Philebus."

⁴⁸ "Politics" 1341 a 23. Cf. also 1342 a 5-16.

melodies.⁴⁹ Plato would never have made such a concession to vulgar taste. A fourth, and very significant, use of music named by Aristotle is that of enjoyment for its own sake as a disciplined, “intellectual” activity (διαγωγή).⁵⁰ Such self-sufficient activity is for Aristotle the end of human life, the complete realization of man’s rationality. All liberal pursuits—that is, those which are not “useful or necessary”⁵¹—are enjoyed for themselves alone, each in its own right. Musical activity of this kind is not merely pleasant, like relaxation, but one in which the pleasant (ἡδονή) is joined with the rationally fine (καλόν).⁵² On the whole, however, Aristotle resisted the dual tendency of Plato to subordinate the individual to the state, even to the extent of drastic limitation of their enjoyment; and, as Plato so often does, to regard as unworthy any form of activity which did not directly promote the philosophic vision. As a result, Aristotle countenances a wider range of musical enjoyment.

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Aristotle’s naturalism and respect for the empirical are reflected in the musical ideas of his followers, and chiefly in Aristoxenus, called ὁ μουσικός, “The Musician,” by the ancients, much as the mediaevals called Aristotle “The Philosopher.” What we know of him justifies the title, for he was without doubt one of the greatest of all musical theorists. His solution of the problem of the well-tempered scale⁵³ was lost upon antiquity and was not known again until Werckmeister re-created and Bach re-introduced it. Our knowledge of Greek music owes more to him than to anyone else. Of all the Greeks, he saw most clearly the essence of music; and his conception reveals a rare insight into the sensuous and organic nature of the art. He conducted a polemic against two extreme schools of musical theory in his time. On the one hand there were the Pythagorean mathematical physicists who saw music as a discipline concerned with numerical proportions and thus completely overlooked its essence, its aspect as sound. Sensuous data were reduced by the Pythagoreans to their numerical equivalents, proportional string lengths; and they regarded these numerical data as musical phenomena.

⁴⁹ “Politics” 1342 a 19-27.

⁵⁰ “Politics” 1338 a 1 f.

⁵¹ “Politics” 1338 a 31.

⁵² “Politics” 1339 b 17-19. Plato approaches this point of view in the “Philebus,” where he says that the good in itself is a mixture of pleasure with knowledge (εὐσυνήμην) (60 A f.), and then includes musical knowledge among these goods (62 C).

⁵³ But see “Oxford History of Music”, Introductory Volume (1929), pp. 4-5.

As Aristoxenus expressed it, these rationalists asserted “that height and depth of pitch consist in certain numerical ratios and relative rates of vibration—a theory utterly extraneous to the subject and quite at variance with the phenomena.”⁵⁴ At the other extreme were those naive empiricists who fastened upon some single field within music and regarded it as the whole of harmonic. Some devoted themselves exclusively to a study of musical notation, but Aristoxenus observes acutely that, “if a man notes down the Phrygian scale, it does not follow that he must know the essence of the Phrygian scale,”⁵⁵ just as one can know all the literal facts about metre without getting at the essence of poetry. Similarly some simple musicians defined harmonic as “the knowledge of clarinets [auloi], and the ability to tell the manner of production of, and the agencies employed in, any piece rendered on the clarinet [aulos].”⁵⁶ To which Aristoxenus replies that all instruments alike participate in the general laws of harmony, but that each instrument employs means peculiar to its limited nature. Harmony in general is broader than the adaptation of sound to any single instrument.

For Aristoxenus music depended inseparably upon both immediate sense-discrimination of sound and the ability to relate such discriminations—both “hearing and intellect,” as he says.⁵⁷ Fine sense-discrimination is not called for in geometry, since the deductive procedure of this study requires only crude vision to indicate and illustrate those abstract principles and axioms under discussion. It is rather the carpenter or handicraftsman who must exercise keenness of vision analogous to the sensuous discrimination of the musician in sound. In order to prove facts about pitches and their relations, such sounds must be accurately discriminated. Aristoxenus consequently thinks of music as a science of melodious sound,⁵⁸ and “of all the objects to which the five senses apply not one other is characterized by an orderliness so extensive and so perfect.”⁵⁹ He saw further that previous theorists had not grasped the sensuously dynamic nature of music, for he realized that, not only did notes have pitch, and not only did pitches stand in formal, mathematical relations one to the other, but also that each note had an auditory func-

⁵⁴ “The Elements of Harmony,” tr. by A. S. Macran (1902), 32 M (Meibohm pagination).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39 M.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 39 M.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 33 M.

⁵⁸ For his interesting distinction between speech and music (melodious sound), see “The Elements of Harmony,” 8 M ff.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5 M.

tion. Each note in a melody bore an organic relation to the other notes. "Melody which accords with the laws of harmony," said Aristoxenus, "is not constituted by intervals and notes alone. Collocation upon a definite principle is also indispensable."⁶⁰ This is the basic principle of formal analysis in music. Although, so far as I know, the ancients made only primitive analyses of musical form (for the good reason, probably, that their music was not formally complicated like ours), this great discovery of the organic nature of music by Aristoxenus certainly provided theoretical foundations for such a study. "It is plain," he said, "that the apprehension of melody consists in noting with both ear and intellect every distinction as it arises in the successive sounds . . . For the apprehension of music depends on these two faculties, sense-perception and memory."⁶¹ Aristoxenus combined in himself the virtues of Pythagoras and Aristotle, a sense of the importance both of abstract relations and of empirical data. It was very unfortunate that the Greeks failed to see the importance of this aspect of Aristoxenus' theory, and it soon dropped from attention.

Aristoxenus inherited another trait of Pythagoreanism, namely moral severity, as was manifested in his adherence to the ethos-theory. In the "Elements of Harmony" references to ethos are very sparse. Of a certain style he says that "far from being contemptible, it is perhaps the noblest of all styles."⁶² But he expresses some doubt as to the effects of music on character. He rebukes certain people for giving too broad a scope to his statement that "'one class of musical art is hurtful to the moral character, another improves it,' while they missed completely our qualification of this statement, 'in so far as musical art can improve the moral character.'"⁶³ Unfortunately he does not elaborate upon this qualification in the writings left to us. Nevertheless, if the evidence from Plutarch is to be credited, Aristoxenus was no less severe in his ethos-theory than Plato. Like the latter, he condemned the vocal music just emerging, and regretted the departure from the simplicity and seriousness of the older music.⁶⁴ Aristoxenus sees the utility of music in forming the character of the young, and of arousing the war-like spirit in soldiers.⁶⁵ He also insists

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 M.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 38 M.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23 M.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31 M.

⁶⁴ Plutarch, *De la Musique*, tr. by H. Weil and T. Reinach, ch. 12. Cf. also ch. 18. Westphal has shown that the passages I shall cite at this point were taken from the "Table-Talk" of Aristoxenus. Cf. Plutarch, *Über die Musik*, tr. and ed. by R. Westphal (1868), pp. 19 ff.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. 26.

that it does not suffice the musician to possess a technical knowledge of rhythm and melody. Combined with these, the complete musician must have a thorough sense of the ethos of music. He must know how to fit the text of a song or the ethos of an instrumental piece to its appropriate mode and rhythm. "Whoever wishes to be a complete musician," he wrote, "must combine a knowledge of musical theory and technique with correct musical judgment,"⁶⁶ and by musical judgment he was referring to a sense of propriety of rhythm and melody to the ethical character the musician intended to convey.

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The ethos-theory did not pass unchallenged in antiquity. A certain school, which Abert calls the "Formalists," denied that music either resembled character or affected its development. The fullest expression of this view is to be found in Philodemus (First Century B.C.). In 1899, Hermann Abert had affirmed that, although hardly any Formalist writing before Philodemus had survived, this writer was really expounding ideas advanced by the Sophists of Fourth Century B.C. in opposition to the ethos-theorists.⁶⁷ Abert showed that Philodemus was expressing the views of Epicurus, who in turn derived in this matter from Democritus. We know that Democritus investigated the physics of hearing and that he regarded music as a late acquisition of man, an article of luxury rather than necessity. He was a Sophist of the Greek enlightenment, during which all traditional views were questioned, among which must have been the theory that music had an ethical character. Human institutions and knowledge, the Sophists maintained, were not expressions of natural law (φύσις) but convention (νόμος) with no deeper foundation or validity than acquiescence. The obvious subjectivity of the response to music could not have escaped their critical minds, and, in fact, Abert holds that on several occasions, when discussing the ethos-theory, Plato seems to be answering opponents.

In 1902, three years after Abert had conjectured in the absence of any documents that the Sophists were violently opposed to the ethos-theory, a manuscript dating from the third or fourth century B.C. was discovered which strikingly confirmed this conjecture. The author of the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. 36. Cf. also chs. 32-36.

⁶⁷ The account of the Formalists here given is largely drawn from Abert's *Die Lehre vom Ethos*, etc., pp. 27-43. The position is also briefly summarized by Abert, "Die Stellung der Musik in der Antiken Kultur," *Die Antike*, vol. 2 (1926), pp. 140 ff. Cf. also Abert, *Die Musik der Griechen*, in his *Gesammelte Schriften und Vorträge* (1929).

manuscript disputes the claims that music imitates character much in the same manner as Philodemus. For, says this author, "Who is there who does not know that the Aetolians and Dolopes, and all the folk round Thermopylae use a diatonic system of music, and yet are braver than the tragedians who are regularly accustomed to the enharmonic scale?"⁶⁸ From such an argument it does not follow necessarily, as the opponents of the ethos-theory maintained, that music does not imitate character. At best this argument can show that the ethos of any given scale is no conclusive index of the entire character of the group in which such a scale is prevalent.

According to Philodemus, music is in itself a combination of sound and rhythm, and has a purely external, physical nature bearing as little internal relation to human feelings as cookery. Music can imitate nothing, and is without influence upon the soul either for good or evil. Where song appears to move the hearer, it is really the poetic text which produces this effect, and not the sound. The religious influence of music, too, passes through poetry rather than the music proper, as is also the case with love songs and drinking songs. The sole purpose of music is to give pleasure and relaxation, hence the entire system of ideas arising out of the view that music has ethical character is false, and its educational and purgative values are misplaced.

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This essay comes to a close with a few bare hints at connections between ancient musical aesthetics and recent thought on the nature of music. The ethos-theory in some form or other has probably always existed. Professor Hugo Leichtentritt has recently shown in *The Musical Quarterly* some facts about Handel's tonalities that reveal a practice similar to the Greek use of modes according to their ethos.⁶⁹ Amply fortified with examples, Professor Leichtentritt shows that "Handel ascribed a distinct emotional force"⁷⁰ to each one of the keys, which he used consistently to express these emotions. For example, "F minor is

⁶⁸ This MS is translated in "The Hibeh Papyri," Part I, London, 1906, p. 48, by B. P. Grenfell and A. J. Hunt. It is succinctly discussed in J. F. Mountford's contribution to "New Chapters in Greek Literature", Second Series (1929), pp. 181-182. See also Abert's remarks on this find and his translation of the MS into German: Hermann Abert, *Ein neuer musikalischer Papyrusfund* in *Zeitschrift der internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, 1906, pp. 79-83.

⁶⁹ H. Leichtentritt, "Harmonic Art of Handel," in *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 21 (1935), pp. 208-219.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

the key generally chosen to express profound sadness, F-sharp minor denotes tragedy," etc.⁷¹ This is to modern music what the ascription of ethos to each mode was to ancient. An investigation of the practice of composers over the entire history of music on these lines probably would essentially confirm the ethos-theory of the Greeks.

However, one cannot think of the ethos-theory without recollecting Hanslick's onslaught upon this sort of conception of music.⁷² It would require a separate article to open the question of how much validity there may be in each of these views. For our purposes, however, I should like to indicate briefly those points in our account at which the ancients approach the absolutist conception of music.

In his specific ideas on music Plato is perhaps the farthest removed from the view that music is essentially a well-ordered sensuous structure of tone, for he explains the beautiful in music wholly in terms of the virtue of the dispositions it imitates. On the other hand Aristotle comes closer to expressing the self-sufficiency of musical enjoyment of which modern musicians are more keenly aware than the ancients appear to have been. For Aristotle holds that music is one of the liberal, intellectual pursuits (διαγωγή) that are self-sufficient. But Aristoxenus came even closer to an understanding of the specific internal nature of music than any other theorist of antiquity. After all, the διαγωγή of Aristotle was a general term applying equally to that self-sufficiency attached to the association of friends, or to thought itself. Aristoxenus saw concretely that music was essentially a matter of auditory discrimination, and that music was an organic structure of sound, as he maintained in the idea that each note of a composition performed some function in the whole. To him music was an art of sensuous dynamics, and by advancing this technical conception of music perhaps for the first time Aristoxenus showed his genius as a theorist.

It should not be inferred that Aristoxenus' adherence also to the view that music imitated human character involved him in any inconsistency with this acute technical analysis of music. For it could be maintained that, while music is a sensuous, dynamic structure of sound and a cumulative compounding of sound and rhythm, this structure at the same

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁷² It might be interesting to point out that Hanslick was not as well-informed on ancient musical aesthetics as he should have been. He wrote: "Though the idea of *motion* appears to us a most far-reaching and important one, it has hitherto been conspicuously disregarded in all enquiries into the nature and action of music." ("The Beautiful in Music", p. 38). The ethos-theory in Plato and others was in fact founded precisely upon a similarity of the motions of music with those of the soul. E. g., see above, p. 156.

time represents ethical character through a similarity in its dynamic aspects with human feeling. But this is a large question into which I cannot venture here. Of all the theorists of antiquity, the most extreme in their denial of any ethical or emotional character of music were the Formalists. So far as we can ascertain, they did not possess that comprehensive and well-articulated knowledge and insight that Aristoxenus had. Somewhat in the manner of Hanslick, they looked upon music as a special, self-contained activity. Their view was more extreme than that of Hanslick, for they held that music could not produce emotion. It was the text, rather than the music proper, that had this effect. Hanslick, far from denying the power of music to evoke emotion, affirmed it very strongly, and he also maintained that music had a dynamic aspect in common with emotions. To the Formalists, music was no more nor less than a structure of sound and rhythm, neither itself possessing a pathetic element nor evoking it in human beings.