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Shaping Character: An Ancient Science of Musical Ethos?

Summary

The idea that the effect of music on the human soul crucially affects matters of education and politics is first found in Plato, with reference to Damon of Athens (5th century BCE). On the basis of a late antique treatise by Aristides Quintilianus, which also refers to Damon, the latter has been ascribed a full-fledged theory of musical ethos. The present contribution critically evaluates the sources from Plato through Aristotle and up until Aristides, arguing for a reading of Plato's *Republic* that does not consider opinions on musical details reflecting the authorial voice, as well as for the absence in the classical era of a musical ethos theory that was based on technical reasoning.

Keywords: Damon; Plato; ethos theory; ancient music; Aristides Quintilianus; 4th century BCE

Die Idee, dass die psychologische Wirkung der Musik auch für Fragen der Erziehung und Politik entscheidend ist, findet sich zuerst bei Platon, mit Verweis auf Damon von Athen (5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.). Auf Basis der Schrift des Aristeides Quintilianus, der ebenso auf Damon zurückverweist, wurde dem Letzteren eine eigenständige Theorie des musikalischen Ethos zugeschrieben. Im vorliegenden Beitrag werden die Quellen von Platon über Aristoteles bis zu Aristides einer kritischen Betrachtung unterzogen. Dabei wird für eine Lesart von Platons *Politeia* plädiert, die Äußerungen der Dialogfiguren über musikalische Details nicht automatisch mit der Autorenmeinung gleichsetzt. In der klassischen Zeit finden sich so keine Anhaltspunkte für eine Ethostheorie, die von technischen Überlegungen ausgeht.

Keywords: Damon; Platon; Ethoslehre; antike Musik; Aristides Kointilianos/Aristeides Quintilianus; 4. Jh. v. Chr.

I Introduction

Some of Damon's research was regarding harmoniai, classifying and describing the various harmonies. He is credited by some scholars as the creator of the hyper and hypo categories (as in Hypophrygian). He did the same with poetic meter. Beyond this technical aspect his work also focused on the social and political consequences of music, through what came to be called the ethos theory. He is the first one to study the effects of different types of music on people's mood.¹

This quotation from the planet's most widely accessed source of opinion quite adequately outlines a view on Damon of Athens that is, *grosso modo*, not uncommon even among scholars specialising in ancient music.² It entails quite a lot, attributing to Damon not only a systematic description of musical structures, both in terms of pitch and temporal organisation, but also a theory of musical 'ethos' that was detailed enough to appear applicable in practice, to the end, potentially, of influencing people. Most prominently, the idea that spawned our conference and the present volume is attributed to him:

οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ κινουῦνται μουσικῆς τρόποι ἄνευ πολιτικῶν νόμων τῶν μεγίστων,
ὥς φησί τε Δάμων καὶ ἐγὼ πείθομαι.

Styles of music are never changed without changing the most essential political rules, as Damon says and I agree.³

And yet, once we access the sources with the critical eye of the philologist and the historian, interpreting references within their proper context and with a sensibility to the texts' respective agendas as well, Damon becomes increasingly evasive. In my contribution I will give an account of the ground on which a common understanding of Damon's ethos theory is built, and reconsider the stability of the various assumptions on which it rests. Our concern will be with surprisingly few authors. Central in all respects is Plato, firstly because he is the major source anyway, then because our image of Damon has come to partake in the supreme philosopher's authority, and finally also because the later texts we are going to consider will serve to explain Plato's method, or are influenced

1 Wikipedia, s. v. Damon (ancient Greek musicologist), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damon_of_Athens (visited on 19/07/2019).

2 Cf. Anderson 1955, 88 with no. 3 on previous opinions, and 89 for his own: "in no other [Pre-Socratic]

thinker can one find comparably precise views, views which in their coordinate form obviously represent a carefully elaborated theory of ethos."

3 Plato, *Republic* 424c; translation Barker 1984, 140.

by him, standing in the Platonic tradition. Among all the possible questions concerning Damon – and there are many – we will be concerned only with his alleged theory of musical ethos, which will necessarily lead us to an evaluation of Plato’s conceptions in this respect: for, if the historicity of a Damonian theory of musical ethics is called into question, Plato can no longer be assumed to have approved of it.

Apart from the above quotation that evidently links musical change to political change – or, more exactly, political change to musical change, since it is the political dangers of musical innovation that are at stake here⁴ – three notions are very commonly found: (1) that Plato associates musical expertise quite generally with Damon; (2) that he attributes to him the ethical evaluation of music; and (3) that Plato uses Damon’s teachings as a basis for the musical politics of his ideal state, and Damon as a convenient point of reference, which spares him the trouble of detailing technical minutiae. All this is mostly inferred from the text of the *Republic*.

Some details are often assumed to be filled in by a late antique musical writer, Aristides Quintilianus, who mentions Damon once in connection with ancient scales (*harmoníai*) “handed down by him”; these scales are almost certainly identical to a set which Aristides had previously specified as ones having been used already by “the most ancient”; and as those that Plato had in mind when referring to various *harmoníai* in the *Republic*.⁵ Damon’s name, at any rate, occurs in the context of ‘ethical’ evaluation of scales by means of characteristics of their constituent notes, so it has been inferred that this was Damon’s approach.⁶ From all this derives what we might call the maximal assumption of an ancient theory of musical ethos, underlying also the initial quotation: a detailed and systematic evaluation of musical structures also in respect of their ethical or psychological effects, both rhythmical and melodic, created in the mid-5th century BCE by Damon of Athens, largely accepted and presupposed by Plato, though its details can only be gleaned from Aristides’ account many centuries later. Several constituent parts of this construction, however, have been assessed critically by recent scholarship. Let us re-evaluate their credentials.

1.1 Damon of Athens, Plato and musical ‘ethos’

First of all, there can be no reasonable doubt that Damon’s interests centred on music, even if one could expect to benefit from discussion with him on any important topic,

4 At stake, that is, in Plato’s text; cf. Anderson 1955, 94: “Socrates’ meaning is plain; but possibly it should be taken into consideration that these words, once they are removed from the Platonic context, do not necessarily constitute, either explicitly or implicitly, any indictment of such musical change. It

might be argued that one thinks they do because of Socrates’ strictures, which surround the quotation and seem to echo it.”

5 Aristides Quintilianus 1.9, 18.5–19.10 Winnington-Ingram; cf. e. g. West 1992, 247 with n. 81.

6 Cf. e. g. Schäfke 1937.

and some deemed him the most sensible man of his generation at Athens.⁷ Since we know him neither as a poet nor as a performer, his musical skills were evidently of a theoretical sort; hence also his association with the ‘sophists.’⁸ That his ideas involved a connection between music and politics seems clear from Plato as well, unless one entertains the possibility that the details on Damon in Plato are largely fictional. However, most scholars would assume that fiction was probably still sufficiently restricted by the memory of the historical Damon, especially if a written work by him was circulating;⁹ so we ought not to be overly sceptical here. Anyway, that Damon believed in an association between music and ethical values (beyond what was commonly assumed) is attested otherwise.¹⁰

Apart from that, we are on a slippery ground. Aristides’ remark about *harmoníai* being handed down by Damon sounds reasonably confident. However, there must have been at least one intermediate stage between ‘Damon’ and Aristides, if not more, and in the course of this process it is at least possible that Aristides misunderstood his source, misled by the association between those *harmoníai* and Plato’s *Republic* on the one hand, and the reference to Damon as a source of musical information in the *Republic*, on the other.¹¹ At any rate, the single mention of Damon in Aristides’ three books *On Music* hardly seems to warrant the view that the details of his ethical ascriptions were heavily influenced by the teaching of the elusive Athenian intellectual, more than six centuries

7 Cf. Plutarch, *Pericles* 180d (ἀνδρῶν χαριέστατον οὐ μόνον τὴν μουσικὴν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλα ὀπόσου βούλει ἄξιον συνδιατρίβειν τηλικούτοις νεανίσκοις – note that this is Nicias speaking); Isocrates 15.235 (Δάμωνος τοῦ κατ’ ἐκείνον τὸν χρόνον φρονιμωτάτου δόξαντος εἶναι τῶν πολιτῶν).

8 Cf. Plutarch, *Pericles* 4; Anderson 1955; Lynch 2013.

9 But cf. Wallace 1991.

10 Philodemus, *On Music* 1.13, evidently resting on a source other than Plato; μὴ μόνον ἀνδρεῖαν ἐμφαί>νεσθαι καὶ σω<φροσύνην> ἀλλὰ καὶ δι<καιοσύνην> “[when making music, ought to] display not only manliness and moderation, but also justice”; if not a purely rhetorical formula, might indicate that a musical display by an educated young nobleman was commonly expected to exhibit manliness and moderation, to which Damon added the idea of justice.

11 I have argued that the specific form and extent of the scales in question betray their origin in the context of the development of modulating auloi (Hagel 2009a; Hagel 2009b, 379–393), at some point between the later 5th and earlier 4th centuries. From our sources it appears unlikely that both detailed and extensive information of that sort predated the

modulating *tónoi* systems would have survived even into the later 4th century. If, as seems plausible, Aristides’ ultimate source is a lost work from Aristoxenus’ hand (cf. Barker 2007, 45–48), we might envisage a scenario where this author listed the earliest available scale structures together with a brief reference to Plato’s discussion, in this context mentioning also Damon. On the other hand, it is just as conceivable that Aristides’ account accurately reflects the historical view taken by Aristoxenus. The modulating aulos is associated with Pronomus (Pausanias 9.12.5; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 631e), whom one tradition made Alcibiades’ music teacher (Duris of Samos, *apud* Athenaeus. 184d). Alcibiades, in turn, in the dramatic setting of the (pseudo-) Platonic *Alcibiades 1* (118c), refers to Damon as a prominent presence. Therefore it is clear that the 4th century would conceive of Pronomus and Damon as contemporaries within the same Athenian intellectual milieu. An account of Damon actually ‘inventing’ a musical mode, finally, would moreover associate him closely with the concerns of instrumental development (pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 1136e).

earlier. On the contrary, I think that a close look at facts and at the text excludes such speculation. Aristides introduces the concept of male and female (and intermediate) qualities of individual notes, on the basis of the particular vowels used for these notes in a kind of solmisation system (a system in which the individual notes are identified with, and/or sung to, different syllables or vowels). This system is only found in Aristides and another late antique source, the excerpts known as Bellermann's Anonymi,¹² which fact would suffice to raise suspicion about attempts to date it back to the classical period. Moreover, the idea of a solmisation system would be to encode musical structures in the mind of the student, in a way that the phonetic shape of syllables automatically evokes intervallic relations. Bellermann's Anonymus throughout exemplifies the system using diatonic scales, as were most common in the Roman period. The ancient 'Damonian' scales, however, are not diatonic.¹³ In principle, they are enharmonic, although now and then exhibiting 'irregular extra notes' (if interpreted from the later standpoint), which might be taken as diatonic alternatives. In connection with the solmisation system, this gives rise to a couple of problems: firstly, it is by no means always clear how to treat the irregularities, and therefore which characteristic to assign to which note. Secondly – and more importantly – the idea of a solmisation system ceases to make any sense if applied to more than one genus: notes of identical designation have different pitches in different genera, and therefore no fixed intervals would be assigned to specific sequences of vowels. In any case, it is even more than doubtful that such an analysis in terms of 'similar' notes in enharmonic and diatonic scales would have been possible in the 5th century, as such an (artificial) attempt demands just the heptatonic regularity and symmetry of the later Aristoxenian unification that these early scales so notoriously lack. All in all, then, Aristides' theory is especially ill-suited for the allegedly Damonian scales.

To be sure, Aristides himself does not envisage returning to these scales for his own music-therapeutic project. After explaining the general idea he continues:

Ἐοίκασι γάρ, ὡς ἔφην, αἱ μὲν ἀρμονίαι τοῖς πλεονάζουσι διαστήμασιν ἢ τοῖς περιέχουσι φθόγγοις, οὗτοι δὲ τοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς κινήμασι τε καὶ παθήμασιν. ὅτι γὰρ δι' ὁμοιότητος οἱ φθόγγοι καὶ συνεχοῦς μελωδίας πλάττουσι τε οὐκ ὄν ἦθος ἐν τε παισὶ καὶ τοῖς ἤδη προβεβηκόσι καὶ ἐνδομυχοῦν ἐξάγουσιν, ἐδήλουν καὶ οἱ περὶ Δάμωννα· ἐν γοῦν ταῖς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ παραδεδομέναις ἀρμονίαις τῶν φερομένων φθόγγων ὅτε μὲν τοὺς θήλεις, ὅτε δὲ τοὺς ἄρρενας ἔστιν εὐρεῖν ἦτοι πλεονάζοντας ἢ ἐπ' ἕλαττον ἢ οὐδ' ὄλως παρειλημμένους, δῆλον ὡς κατὰ τὸ ἦθος ψυχῆς ἐκάστης καὶ ἀρμονίας χρησιμεύουσιν.

12 Anonymi Bellermannii 9–10; 77; 86; 91–92.

13 Ancient scales, in the standard system known from Aristoxenus (4th century BCE) on, come in three 'kinds' (genera): diatonic, consisting of tones and

semitones only; chromatic, dominated by semitones and 1-tone intervals; enharmonic, set apart by the use of quartertones and ditones. Fine tuning accounted for various 'shades' of these.

As I have said, the *harmoníai* resemble their frequent intervals or the notes which bound them, and these resemble the movements and emotions of the soul. For, the fact that it is through similarity and a continuous melody that the notes form a character that does not yet exist, in children just as in older people, as well as bring out one deeply hidden, was made clear by Damon's circle as well. At any rate, in the *harmoníai* handed down by him, one can sometimes find that among the moving notes it is the female ones, and at other times, the male ones that are frequent, or less so, or not adopted altogether, so that it is obviously with regard to the character of each particular soul and *harmonía* that they are used.¹⁴

Textual considerations support our line of reasoning. Firstly, although Aristides clearly wants to convey the impression that his treatise stands in a tradition of musical lore reaching back to Plato and Pythagoras, he by no means claims that he has drawn his ideas from Damon. On the contrary, “as well” (καί) clearly indicates that he regards Damon more as his colleague than his master: Damon's scales are the earliest evidence Aristides can come up with, and still, he finds his ideas supported by their structure. How this really works out, we are not told, by the way, and therefore we are at a loss in determining how to apply Aristides' nice principles to the ‘irregular’ notes. Secondly, his “at any rate” (γούν) appears to betray that Aristides had no direct information on the principles underlying Damon's supposed ethical teaching.¹⁵ It is only by inference from the ancient scales that Aristides determines that they must have been either evaluated or even construed by “Damon's circle” according to principles similar to his own.

Anyway, the categorisation of all factors into female and male and intermediate entirely permeates Aristides' method, in a way that, if his characterisation of scales is Damonian, the contents of his pedagogic-therapeutic second book seemingly would have to depend on Damon wholesale. But nothing either in Plato or in any other reference to Damon associates him with a predilection for interpreting the world in terms of gender polarity.¹⁶ All in all, Aristides certainly insinuates that Damon and others had developed a systematic classification of musical ethos as simplistic as his own is, but he was unable to adduce any proof for his assumption, up to the point of excusing himself for not doing so right at the outset of his respective chapter:

14 Aristides Quintilianus 2.14; 80.23–81.3 Winnington-Ingram.

15 Cf. Liddell, Scott and Jones 1996: “restrictive Particle with an inferential force, *at least then* [...] freq. in adducing an instance, or a fact giving rise to a presumption [...] *at all events*”.

16 Unless one counts the fact that the young lyre player in the testimony recorded by Philodemus (cf. no. 9) is expected to show both manliness and moderation, the latter the characteristic female virtue in Plato's *Republic*.

Καιρὸς δὲ λοιπὸν ἐξηγεῖσθαι ποῖα μὲν μέλη, ποῖοι δὲ ῥυθμοὶ καταρτύσουσι τὰ τῆς φύσεως παθήματα. λέξω δὴ τὰ μὲν παλαιοῖς τισιν εἰρημένα, τὰ δὲ εἰσέτι νῦν σιωπηθέντα οὔτ' ἀγνωσίᾳ τῶν συγγραφέων οὔτε βασκανίᾳ· τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ οὔδ' εἰπεῖν θέμις ἀνδρῶν πέρι φιλοσόφων μουσικῆ τετελεσμένων· ἀλλὰ γὰρ τὰ μὲν αὐτοῖς ἐν συγγράμμασι κατετάττετο, τὰ δ' ἀπορρητότερα ταῖς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὁμίλιας διεσώζετο. αἰτία δ' ἦν ἡ τῶν τότε περὶ τὰ κάλλιστα ὀρμή τε καὶ φιλοχωρία· νυνὶ δὲ τοσαύτης ἐπιπολαζούσης (δεῖ γὰρ εὐφημεῖν) ἀφιλομουσίας <ἄρ'> ἀγαπητὸν ἔσται τοῖς μετρίως ἐπιμελέσιν, εἰ βίβλω οὐ σαφές τι περιεχούση περιπέσειεν.

It is now time to explain what kinds of melody and rhythm will discipline the natural emotions. I shall set out what some ancient writers said, and also some things which have not previously been discussed – not, however, because the writers were ignorant or malicious. That would be a quite improper thing to say of philosophers initiated in the mysteries of music. The fact is rather that while they expounded some things in their writings, they reserved the more esoteric secrets for their discussions with one another. The reason lay in the enthusiastic affection of the men of those times for all that is finest. But now, when indifference to music (to put it politely) is so widespread, we cannot expect people with only a mild interest in the subject to tolerate being faced with a book in which not everything is explicitly spelled out.¹⁷

These statements are entirely consistent with the view that what Aristides took over from “the ancient writers” was merely the general idea of musical ethos and its pedagogical usage. As he expounds on no technical details beyond his simple gendering of notes in the regular scale, this must be the “esoteric secrets” that could not be found in any book so far. However, if we subtract this bit from Aristides’ system, nothing technical in his work is left that might be associated with Damon. All the more we can understand why Aristides had to adduce, desperately enough, the ‘Damonian’ scales as arguments for Damon’s adherence to a paradigm similar to his own.

If Aristides had no access to a truly Damonian theory of musical ethos, this need not exclude, of course, that Plato, who lived only a few decades after the time in question, did possess such information. However, it has often been observed that his *Republic* conspicuously does not mention Damon in its discussion of *harmoníai* to be admitted to or excluded from the ideal state. Instead, the average musical knowledge of Socrates’ dialogue partner Glaucon suffices to supply the general characteristics of individual ‘modes’. Far from invoking a quasi-scientific ethos theory, therefore, Plato bases the results of this

17 Aristides Quintilianus 2.7; 65.10–21 Winnington-Ingram; translation Barker 1989, 469.

famous passage – the admission of Dorian and Phrygian only – on what he depicts as entirely common notions.

Only when the argument turns to rhythms, and when both dialogue partners confess their ignorance in this intricate matter, is the question deferred to later discussion with Damon:

Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, καὶ μετὰ Δάμωνος βουλευσόμεθα, τίνες τε ἀνελευθερίας καὶ ὕβρεως ἢ μανίας καὶ ἄλλης κακίας πρέπουσαι βάσεις, καὶ τίνες τοῖς ἐναντίοις λειπτέον ῥυθμούς.

‘Then on these points we shall take advice from Damon,’ I said, ‘and ask him which movements are suitable for illiberality, conceit, madness and other vices, and which rhythms we should keep and assign to their opposites.’¹⁸

Here Damon seems indeed regarded as a specialist on rhythmical ethos, at least. But not even that is absolutely beyond doubt, since it cannot be taken for granted that Damon is envisaged to have dealt with the specific question before. Instead, he might be conceived as a specialist confronted with a novel question belonging to his field – an option that seems much less far-fetched when we recall the Socratic method of other Platonic dialogues, explicitly spelled out in the *Apology*, which consists exactly in questioning ‘specialists’ (with the ‘unintended’ outcome of eventually exposing their ignorance). Nevertheless, in the sequel to the above quotation, Damon is depicted as not only analysing rhythms, but passing judgement on them, although it is still not clear whether this would have been done according to the criteria envisaged for the ideal state:

οἶμαι δὲ με ἀκηκοέναι οὐ σαφῶς ἐνόπλιόν τέ τινα ὀνομάζοντος αὐτοῦ σύνθετον καὶ δάκτυλον καὶ ἠρῶν γε, οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως διακοσμούντος καὶ ἴσον ἄνω καὶ κάτω τιθέντος, εἰς βραχὺ τε καὶ μακρὸν γιγνόμενον, καί, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἴαμβον καὶ τιν' ἄλλον τροχαῖον ὠνόμαζε, μήκη δὲ καὶ βραχύτητας προσῆπτε. καὶ τούτων τισὶν οἶμαι τὰς ἀγωγὰς τοῦ ποδὸς αὐτὸν οὐχ ἦττον ψέγειν τε καὶ ἐπαινεῖν ἢ τοὺς ῥυθμούς αὐτούς – ἦτοι συναμφοτέρων τι· οὐ γὰρ ἔχω λέγειν.

I think I have heard him not very clearly talking about one in armour, put together, and a finger and, yes, a heroic one, somehow arraying them and making up and down equal as it turned into short and long; and, I think, he talked about an “iamb” and some other “trochee” and attached longs and shorts to them. And of these, I think, he blamed and praised the conduct of the foot no less than the rhythms themselves – or somehow both? I cannot tell.¹⁹

18 Plato, *Republic* 400b; translation Barker 1984, 134.

19 Plato, *Republic* 400c; translation Barker 1984, 134.

It is perhaps surprising that this description of Damon in discussion or lecturing should be characterised by such a considerable admixture of comic elements: not always easy to render in translation, they cannot but signal irony.²⁰ As a literary device, they entertain the reader by combining bits and pieces of rhythmical theory out of their context, in such a way that they appear nonsensical: e. g. the obvious paradox of “making up and down equal”, whose precise sense as the definition of ‘equal rhythm’ the reader is expected to be familiar with. Apart from entertainment, however, we would not expect Plato to mark Damon’s entry onto the stage as comic, were it not for a particular reason. We need not pin it down – the true philosopher’s contempt for technicalities is a plausible suggestion²¹ – but what we get is at least a clear signal that there is no Damonian lore that in Plato’s eyes deserves untempered reverence. And, as regards the criteria that inform Damon’s evaluation, the passage gives us not the slightest hint. Considering the contrast to the comparative richness of detail (even if blurred) on rhythmical analysis on a purely technical level, this absence would appear highly surprising if Damon had in fact proceeded from technical analysis to ethical assessment systematically. On balance, the text of the *Republic* does not support the notion of a fully fledged Damonian ethos theory; indeed the contrary is true.

If Damon is now out of the game as a fictional as well as a historical authority on a systematic theory of musical ethos, our quest narrows down to Plato himself. So, are the conclusions about *harmoníai* reached in the *Republic* backed by – unwritten – systematic evaluation of their structures in the Academy (accompanied perhaps by analogous teachings on rhythms, which are just not directly reflected in the *Republic*), because their treatment would have required too long an excursion? Or, in other words, did Plato believe he had found (or inherited, at any rate) the recipe, by which to judge the ethical value of music (apart from the lyrics)?

Again, the ironic treatment of rhythmical technicalities must caution us against such an assumption, especially in combination with the complete absence of technical criteria in the evaluation of modes, which appeared to be judged solely on the basis of common conceptions (however, these too may be fictional).

Apart from that, any view on that question must needs depend on our view of the *Republic* as philosophy expressed in a literary work. Plato has often been chided for many things “he” says there; however, there is nothing there to prompt us to assume that any one of the interlocutors is expressing the views of the dialogue’s author. In the case of the ‘purgation of music,’ the presented views are moreover qualified, and conspicuously so, by the confession of Socrates, the protagonist, not to understand anything about the subject, and the initial assertion of his dialogue partner, Glaucon, that he is unable to

20 Cf. Wallace 2005, 150: “with his customary dry humor”; also Anderson 1955, 91: “gentle parody”

21 Cf. Anderson 1955, 91–96.

answer the question, in spite of Socrates having addressed him half-ironically as *mousikós*, ‘educated’. The scene is therefore set for all kinds of misconceptions in a rough and brutal attempt to identify proper and improper elements of music culture. Moreover, the result of the evaluation of *harmoníai* is puzzling enough, as Phrygian is admitted side-by-side with Dorian. Aristotle, it is often said, already rebuked Plato for this obvious error.²²

But neither was Plato that careless, nor would Aristotle have assumed him to be. In fact, Aristotle, as Plato’s former student being admittedly in a better position than we are, proved very well able to distinguish between the voice of Plato and those of his literary figures, including Socrates. A glance at his manner of quoting Platonic texts in his own *Politics* shows how naturally this distinction expressed itself.²³ Whenever talking about the *Republic*, Aristotle refrains from attributing the views found there to Plato, even if that demanded a more complex mode of quotation (which many modern studies on Plato might benefit from imitating). Not that Plato was wrong about the Phrygian,

ὁ δ' ἐν τῇ Πολιτείᾳ Σωκράτης οὐ καλῶς τὴν φρυγιστὴν μόνην καταλείπει μετὰ τῆς δωριστί.

but the ‘Socrates’ of the *Republic* is wrong to retain just the Phrygian along with the Dorian.²⁴

Similarly, a little later on, Aristotle even relates the views of others in the same painstaking manner:

διὸ καλῶς ἐπιτιμῶσι καὶ τοῦτο Σωκράτει τῶν περὶ τὴν μουσικὴν τινες [...]

For this reason some musical experts quite fairly find fault with Socrates [...]²⁵

As its author, Plato is named only where Aristotle refers to the *Republic* for the first time, and here it becomes most conspicuous that the view in question is not quoted in Plato’s name:

[...] ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Πολιτείᾳ τῇ Πλάτωνος· ἐκεῖ γὰρ ὁ Σωκράτης φησὶ [...]

[...] as in Plato’s *Republic*: for there Socrates says [...]²⁶

Most importantly, however, this manner of quotation is not mechanical. When referring to the *Laws*, Plato’s second large work on the question of an ideal constitution, in which

22 Cf. e.g. Anderson 1955, 95: “Aristotle’s outspokenly frank disagreement with Plato over the ethos of Phrygian?”

23 Cf. Halliwell 2006, 200–202.

24 Aristotle, *Politics* 1342a; translation Barker 1984, 181.

25 Aristotle, *Politics* 1342a; translation Barker 1984, 181.

26 Aristotle, *Politics* 1261a; translation Barker 1984.

much space is also devoted to music, Aristotle knows equally well that here it was more or less Plato's own ideas that he – at least in the specific case under scrutiny – put in the mouth of the unnamed Athenian. Consequently, Aristotle does not hesitate to write

Πλάτων δὲ τοὺς Νόμους γράφων [...] ᾤετο [...]

But Plato, when writing the *Laws*, thought [...] ²⁷

This distinction, in fact, would sufficiently explain the differences between the apparently much more rigorist *Republic* and the comparatively more moderate *Laws*, both in musical and in other matters, much better than the assumption of an intervening evolution in Plato's thought. The *Republic* explores and exemplifies the philosophic quest for the ideal state, in a most uncompromising way exactly for the sake of clearly demonstrating the method. The *Laws*, in contrast, are situated within and aiming at reality, with all its practical uncertainties. The treatment of music exemplarily illustrates this difference. In the *Republic*, Socrates talks *as if* all necessary information were available to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' music. This results in simplistic decisions, rejecting instruments and modes on the basis of superficial associations that – as must have been clear to everybody – would not do justice to actual musical reality. The details are accordingly marked by irony and statements of ignorance, but all this is by no means meant to detract from the very serious assertion: that music, with all its effects on human psychology, is a crucial factor in the state, and ought therefore to be regulated, according to as scientific an assessment of its ingredients as is possible. As a proxy for such a true understanding of musical ethos, Plato introduces Glaucon's questionable expertise and the anticipation of Damon's professional support. Indeed, Plato was not so naïve as to believe in a system like that of Aristides, which claims to determine the details of musical ethos. Consequently, the *Laws* cannot base the necessary musical regulations on such a 'true' theory, which explains the absence of technical details there: in practice, the experience and wisdom of aged citizens who have acquired the ability to assess what is appropriate must substitute for it. Nevertheless Plato had not given up, in principle, his vision of a true music theory: but he knew only too well how far any technical descriptions of his time fell short of it – after all, even with all our modern advances in psychology and neurology, we ourselves are still a long way away from achieving such a theory (and of course, are much more aware about cultural conditioning). Thus we find him stating the ideal basis of musical laws only as a potentiality:

ὥσθ', ὅπερ ἔλεγον, εἰ δύναιτό τις ἐλεῖν αὐτῶν καὶ ὀπωσοῦν τὴν ὀρθότητα, θαρροῦντα χρῆ εἰς νόμον ἄγειν καὶ τάξιν αὐτά.

27 Aristotle, *Politics* 1266b; translation Barker 1984.

Thus, as I said, if one could somehow grasp the nature of correctness in melodies, one ought boldly to bring them under law and regulation.²⁸

If Plato operated with simplistic ideas only as a temporary expedient, this does not mean that such ideas had not been around otherwise. A text plausibly dating from Plato's day, preserved in the famous Hibe Papyrus 1.13, quotes and argues against music theorists who held that enharmonic music would render people manly, whereas chromatic music would engender cowardice. Analogous ascriptions of various characteristics to genera or modes appear in the sources over the centuries, which we need not treat here. Suffice it to state that they are never based on technical arguments, and are partly contradictory, thus evoking the ridicule of thinkers who did not subscribe to the idea.²⁹ Thus it is hardly possible to construe a consistent history of these ideas; at any rate, they appear to rest on a purely impressionistic basis, governed by cultural connotations associated with the appraised characteristics.

Throughout, however, the major thinkers abstain from simplicity. Aristotle basically reflects Plato's approach, as he accepts that music does influence the character and the soul as proven by daily, notably religious, experience:

[...] δεῖ μὴ μόνον τῆς κοινῆς ἡδονῆς μετέχειν ἀπ' αὐτῆς, ἧς ἔχουσι πάντες αἰσθησιν (ἔχει γὰρ ἡ μουσικὴ τιν' ἡδονὴν φυσικὴν, διὸ πάσαις ἡλικίαις καὶ πᾶσιν ἦθεσιν ἢ χρῆσις αὐτῆς ἐστι προσφιλέης), ἀλλ' ὄραν εἶ πη καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἦθος συντείνει καὶ πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν. τοῦτο δ' ἂν εἴη δῆλον, εἰ ποιοὶ τινες τὰ ἦθη γιγνόμεθα δι' αὐτῆς. ἀλλὰ μὴν ὅτι γιγνόμεθα ποιοὶ τινες, φανερόν διὰ πολλῶν μὲν καὶ ἐτέρων, οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ καὶ διὰ τῶν Ὀλύμπου μελῶν· ταῦτα γὰρ ὁμολογουμένως ποιεῖ τὰς ψυχὰς ἐνθουσιαστικάς, ὁ δ' ἐνθουσιασμοῦ τοῦ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἦθος πάθος ἐστίν.

[...] we ought not only to gain from it the common sort of pleasure, which everyone has the capacity to perceive (since music dispenses pleasure of a natural kind, so that the use of it is beloved by all ages and characters), but ought also to see whether it has a tendency to improve the character and the soul. We would have proof of that, if we are caused by music to acquire specific qualities in our characters. And indeed we do acquire specific qualities, as is shown by many things, and especially by the melodies of Olympus: for it is generally

28 Plato, *Laws* 657b; translation Barker 1984, 145.

29 Cf. Philodemus, *On music* 4.2.15, quoting characterisations of enharmonic and chromatic either as solemn and noble, as opposed to unmanly and vul-

gar, or as harsh and despotic, as opposed to gentle. After the classical era, when the enharmonic had gone out of use, characteristics formerly ascribed to it became associated typically with the diatonic.

agreed that they inspire our souls with ecstasy (*enthousiasmós*), and ecstasy is a qualification [*pathos*] of the character [*éthos*] of the soul.³⁰

Just like Plato, Aristotle only deals briefly with *harmoníai*, recommending the Dorian, among unspecified others, for common educational purposes, and omits a discussion of rhythms altogether. Further details are left to specialists:

ἐπεὶ δὴ τὴν μὲν μουσικὴν ὀρώμεν διὰ μελοποιίας καὶ ῥυθμῶν οὖσαν, τούτων δ' ἐκάτερον οὐ δεῖ λεληθέναι τίνα δύναμιν ἔχει πρὸς παιδείαν, καὶ πότερον προαιρετέον μᾶλλον τὴν εὐμελῆ μουσικὴν ἢ τὴν εὐρυθμον, νομίσαντες οὖν πολλὰ καλῶς λέγειν περὶ τούτων τῶν τε νῦν μουσικῶν ἐνίου καὶ τῶν ἐκ φιλοσοφίας ὅσοι τυγχάνουσιν ἐμπείρως ἔχοντες τῆς περὶ τὴν μουσικὴν παιδείας, τὴν μὲν καθ' ἕκαστον ἀκριβολογίαν ἀποδώσομεν ζητεῖν τοῖς βουλομένοις παρ' ἐκείνων, νῦν δὲ νομικῶς διέλωμεν, τοὺς τύπους μόνον εἰπόντες περὶ αὐτῶν.

We see that music consists in melodic composition and rhythms, and we must neither forget the educative power that each of them has, nor neglect to ask whether music with good melody or music with good rhythm is to be preferred. Now since I believe that many excellent things have been said about these matters both by some contemporary musical experts and by those philosophers who have been well acquainted with education in music, I shall hand over to them the people who wish to pursue a precise account of every detail, and deal with the issues only in general terms for the present, stating no more than their outlines.³¹

[...] δέχεσθαι δὲ δεῖ κἄν τίνα ἄλλην ἡμῖν δοκιμάζωσιν οἱ κοινωνοὶ τῆς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατριβῆς καὶ τῆς περὶ τὴν μουσικὴν παιδείας.

[...] and we should also accept other *harmoniai* if these are recommended to us by our colleagues in the study of philosophy and in the musical aspects of education.³²

In respect of the Damonian question, it is noteworthy that Aristotle's words display no awareness of a past authority. The authoritative voices he has in mind seem primarily to be contemporaries, both musicians and theorists. His own students Aristoxenus and Theophrastus come to mind, who both published works on musical matters, the first explicitly concerned with questions of ethos, the other emphasising the psychological

30 Aristotle, *Politics* 1339b–1340a; translation Barker 1984, 174–175.

179.

32 Aristotle, *Politics* 1342a; translation Barker 1984.

31 Aristotle, *Politics* 1341b; translation Barker 1984.

aspects of music's nature.³³ On the other hand, we might also think about Plato, whose views on the use of music as expressed in the *Laws* seem not very different from Aristotle's. In any case, the general reference to what he seems to envisage as a possible variety of sources to be consulted, with different backgrounds, apparently precludes the predominance of a single account, and therefore the existence of a dominant systematic evaluation of musical modes analogous to the model of Aristides.

Neither do we find any trace of such an idea in Aristoxenus, the most renowned and most influential musical writer throughout antiquity. Although musically conservative with rigorist traits, his general stance on musical ethos, as emerging from extensive quotations in the pseudo-Plutarchan *On Music*,³⁴ never sets out to evaluate musical technicalities on an ontological basis. Quite to the contrary, the ability to pass adequate musical judgment is presented as acquired by proper education (which makes the whole point regrettably circular).

2 Conclusions

All in all, therefore, the three major exponents of 4th-century (musical) philosophy appear to agree that, as things stand, musical value is to be assessed by an experienced, well-educated taste, there being neither automatable recipes like those offered by Aristides nor quick shortcuts of the sort developed by Socrates and Glaucon on the *Republic's* literary surface.

As we have seen, a critical assessment of the sources does not support the retro-projection of Aristides' ideas, or of anything similar, to the classical era. This is of course not to say that the idea of musical ethos with its pedagogical and political implication was not influential at that period, though it is difficult to see how far it was received outside elitist circles. At any rate, it was based on common experience, above all on the fact that particular melodies, modes and rhythms would instantly invoke the emotional state with which they had become associated through participation in communal activities, ritual, military, sympotic or whatever. Ancient city states had their traditional songs accompanying recurrent events, perhaps associated with a half-legendary musician of the remote past, and newly founded ones might associate themselves with outstanding composers also of a more recent past.³⁵ The ensuing intimate connection between an established city's constitution and music of a more archaic hue, in contrast to ongoing musical development fuelled by constant competition between living poet-performers,

33 On Theophrastus' views cf. Barker 2007, 411–436.

34 Cf. Barker 2007, 233–259.

35 Cf. e. g. pseudo-Plutarch, *On music* 1134b; Scholion to *Odyssey* 3.267; Pausanias 4.27.7.

could quite naturally load politically conservative discourse with musical overtones. Another factor being national pride and an emerging 'European' self-awareness in the prolonged aftermath of the Persian wars, we generally find that the elements of music rejected by conservative writers are generally those which are regarded as recent or carry foreign associations: the Lydian and Phrygian *harmoníai* in contrast to the Dorian,³⁶ or the chromatic genus, which probably evolved along with modulating instruments. In that way, ancient musical ethics before Aristides, wherever going beyond most general statements, was unable to transcend the level of a mere self-assertion of culturally acquired taste. Aristides, on the other hand, provides but the late proof of how poor any elaborated system would have looked, justifying the wise restraint of earlier philosophers.

36 Cf. Plato, *Laches* 188d; 193d; Heraclides Ponticus at

Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 624c–625f.

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