

## Second seminar: Book 2, 656d-667a

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### *Mousikēs orthotes*

In my previous lecture, I illustrated the fundamental importance for the young of musical, more specifically choral education, which (acting as a sort of ‘incantation’, *epōidē*) will discipline their pleasures and pains. I then explained that, for Plato, the paideutic value of *choreia* may be theoretically understood through the concept of *mimēsis*, according to which «what is said, sung or represented through music and dance» should represent a good (καλόν) model, since good postures and melodies, when opportunely practiced and performed, are a vehicle for leading people to virtues and good dispositions of the soul. For this reason the young should be educated in taking pleasure in the ‘right’ music, and musical genres performed in the city should be closely controlled and regulated by the ‘law’, whose most important task is that of preserving the most traditional melodies and rhythms<sup>1</sup>.

After the first explicit mention of the ‘laws’ in Book 2, 656c (the passage with which we closed our first seminar), the text of the dialogue focuses on the need to reject musical novelty (because it is potentially dangerous for citizens) and instead, to maintain in Greek cities the traditional musical practices, as has always been done in Egypt:

- Ath. «[656d] Yet at present this [i.e. the fact that the artists will be allowed to teach whatever the composer himself likes best] is just what is permitted in virtually every city, except in Egypt».
- Clin. «What sort of laws do you say they have concerning such matters in Egypt?».
- Ath. «Even to hear them described is astonishing. Once, long ago, so it seems, they came to understand the argument that we have just been setting out, according to which the young men in each city must become practised in good postures and good melodies (ὅτι καλὰ μὲν σχήματα, καλὰ δὲ μέλη δεῖ μεταχειρίζεσθαι ταῖς συνηθείαις τοὺς ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν νέους). These they prescribed, and they advertised which they are and what they are like in the temples: [656e] it was forbidden, as it still is, for painters or any other portrayers of postures and representations to make innovations

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<sup>1</sup> Let’s remember that the Greek word *nomos* does not have an exclusively political meaning, but also refers to any designated form of social order, including rules of moral behavior, religious beliefs and practices. On the special musical meaning of the term see *Laws* Book 3, 700b.

(καινοτομεῖν) beyond these, or to think up anything outside the traditional material (οὐδ' ἐπινοεῖν ἄλλ' ἅττα ἢ τὰ πάτρια), in these areas or in *mousikē* in general. If you look you will find that what was written or depicted there ten thousand years ago – and I mean ten thousand literally, not as a figure of speech – is neither better [657a] nor worse than what is made nowadays, but is done with the same art».

Clin. «What you say is amazing».

Ath. «It is, you will admit, a supreme expression of the aims of the lawgiver and the statesman, though you could find other things there that are bad. But as concerns music, it is true and noteworthy that it was possible in these matters for a bold man to lay down lasting laws prescribing melodies that possess a natural correctness (μέλη τὰ τὴν ὀρθότητα φύσει παρεχόμενα). To do this would be a task for a god, or a godlike man, just as in Egypt they say that the melodies that have [657b] been preserved for this great period of time were the compositions of Isis. 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 (ὥσθ', ὅπερ ἔλεγον, εἰ δύναίτο τις ἐλεῖν αὐτῶν καὶ ὁπωσοῦν τὴν ὀρθότητα, θαρροῦντα χρῆ εἰς νόμον ἄγειν καὶ τάξιν αὐτά). For pleasure and pain, in their constant pursuit of new music to indulge in, have little power to destroy a choric art that is sanctified, just by mocking its antiquity (ὡς ἡ τῆς ἡδονῆς καὶ λύπης ζήτησις τοῦ καινῆ ζητεῖν ἀεὶ μουσικῆ χρῆσθαι σχεδὸν οὐ μεγάλην τιὰ δύναμιν ἔχει πρὸς τὸ διαφθεῖραι τὴν καθιερωθεῖσαν χορείαν ἐπικαλοῦσα ἀρχαιότητα). In Egypt, at least, it does not seem to have been able to destroy it: quite the contrary»<sup>2</sup>.

Plato restates here that the appreciation of καλὰ σχήματα and καλὰ μέλη is also a question of training, as the Egyptians, who prescribed that the young men in each city must become practised in good postures and good melodies, had already understood a long time ago. Of course, it is also evident that musical *paideia* not only should commence very early, in order to let the process of unconscious assimilation of goodness gradually develop, but should also be maintained for adult people: hence the need to fix 'by law' the preservation of traditional music and dance, here described as καθιερωθεῖσα χορεία (that is, as 'sanctified choric art', hence deeply rooted in the established ritual system), which has the added value of possessing a 'natural correctness' (τὴν ὀρθότητα φύσει)<sup>3</sup>.

But, apart from remarking once again the importance of a traditional religious setting for the most desirable social and political order, here Plato reintroduces a notion which will become essential to his discussion of the musical *kalon* and its criteria of judgment:

<sup>2</sup> *Laws* 656d-657b (transl. Barker).

<sup>3</sup> Again it is clear how much a religious orientation informs what Plato has to say about music.

the notion of *mousikēs orthotēs*.

The first mention of such a concept was in Book 1 (642a), in the already quoted passage which connected drunkenness with the proper education of the young through music<sup>4</sup>. Musical correctness was then introduced again in Book 2 within the discussion concerning the pleasure afforded to the soul by music, which – according to Plato – cannot be identified with the μουσικῆς ὀρθότης, as most people instead seem think (even if the reason for this misunderstanding is to be identified just with the pleasure indissolubly linked to the appreciation of musical goodness):

«Yet most people certainly say that musical correctness (μουσικῆς ὀρθότητα) consists in the power to provide pleasure for the soul (τὴν ἡδονὴν ταῖς ψυχαῖς πορίζουσιν δύναμιν). But that assertion is intolerable and cannot even be uttered without blasphemy. It is more likely that what leads us astray is this [...]»<sup>5</sup>.

Its relevance to the topic of musical goodness is thus reaffirmed in the passage we are dealing with, which has the explicit function of shifting the discourse to the importance of the assessment of such ‘correctness’: «if one could somehow grasp (ἐλεῖν) the nature of correctness in melodies, one ought boldly to bring them under law and regulation [...]»<sup>6</sup>. After having done this – Plato says – pleasure and pain, through their constant pursuit of novelties in music, will turn out to have little power to destroy the benefits of traditional holy music.

Despite the importance of such a concept, however, the question of its evaluation is not immediately undertaken. Its treatment, instead, is postponed to that part of Book 2 which is more explicitly concerned with the three criteria of judgment about τὸ καλόν (from *Laws* 667b onwards): pleasure (*hēdonē*), correctness (*orthotēs*) and ethical utility (*ōphelia*). More precisely, correctness turns out to be the ‘second’ among the three qualifications that «anyone who is to judge intelligently» (τὸν μέλλοντα ἔμφορα κριτὴν ἔσεσθαι) must have: firstly, he must know «what» the original of such imitation is (ὅ τε ἐστὶ); secondly, whether that particular representation is made «correctly» (ὡς

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<sup>4</sup> *Laws* 642a (transl. Bury): «the fact is that the right ordering of this [i.e. the matter of drunkenness] could never be treated adequately and clearly in our discourse apart from rightness in music (ἄνευ μουσικῆς ὀρθότητος)».

<sup>5</sup> *Laws* 655d (transl. Barker).

<sup>6</sup> *Laws* 657b (transl. Barker).

ὀρθῶς εἴργασται); thirdly, whether it is made «well» (ὡς εὖ εἴργασται)<sup>7</sup>. I am not going to deal with that part of the text, but it is worth at least anticipating that, for Plato, we obtain ‘correctness’ in music only when its constituents are ‘appropriate’ (προσήκοντα), that is, when its technical elements are opportunely selected (ἐκλέγεσθαι) and used during the performance, in order both to let the elders (i.e. the previously mentioned members of the Chorus of Dionysus) gain ‘enjoyment’ (ἡδῶνται) from their songs and to make them attract the younger men towards noble manners (ἡθῶν χρηστῶν)<sup>8</sup>. That is to say: if a musical composition is ‘correct’, all the elements of its ensemble have to be consistent with one another and need to fit into that particular genre. Thanks to this, such a music will enable the elders (who are responsible for the control of education) to ‘enchant’ the young and to instill virtue in them<sup>9</sup>.

### Public performances and musical judgment

Let’s now go back to the passage we were dealing with: *Laws* 656d-657b. The occasion for the digression (which seems to be a constant stylistic feature of this late Platonic work) is provided at 657c in an argument propounded by the Athenian Stranger:

«Do we then boldly state that correct procedure in music, and in recreation involving choric activity (τὴν τῆ μουσικῆ καὶ τῆ παιδιᾶ μετὰ χορείας χρεῖαν ὀρθῆν εἶναι), is something like this: we enjoy ourselves (χαίρωμεν) when we think that we are flourishing, and we think that we are flourishing whenever we enjoy ourselves? Isn’t that so?»<sup>10</sup>.

The ‘correct procedure’ to do with music (*mousikē*) and play (*paidia*), in connection with *choreia*, will actually be described at length only in the following sentence, but its announcement has the purpose of introducing once again the notion of ‘enjoyment’, which will be discussed hereafter as a possible criterion of musical judgment for public performances. Instead of correctness, then, the author returns here to the theme of

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<sup>7</sup> *Laws* 669a-b.

<sup>8</sup> *Laws* 670c ff.

<sup>9</sup> Plato also adds that, for people charged with such a responsibility, it is essential «to distinguish in outline what are suitable songs (πρεπούσας ᾠδὰς) for men and women respectively» and «match them appropriately (προσαρμόττειν) to *harmoniai* and rhythms. For it would be dreadful for singing to be wrong in its entire *harmonia*, or rhythm in its entire rhythm, if he assigned *harmoniai* and rhythms that were quite unsuitable (μηδὲν προσήκοντα) for the songs. Hence it is necessary to lay down at least the outlines of these by law as well» (*Laws* 802e, transl. Barker).

<sup>10</sup> *Laws* 657c (transl. Barker).

‘pleasure’, nevertheless definitely shifting the discussion from the identification of what is *kalon* in music (which he had explained by means of the mimetic theory) to the question of how we are to judge it:

Ath. «[657d] And in such a condition, one of enjoyment, we cannot keep still?».

Clin. «That is so».

Ath. «Now isn’t it true that those of us who are young are prepared to perform in choruses themselves, while those of us who are older think of ourselves as suitably occupied in watching them, enjoying their games and festivities (χαίροντες τῇ ἐκείνων παιδιᾷ τε καὶ ἑορτάσει)? For our nimbleness has now left us, and it is our nostalgic longing for it that makes us set up contests for those who can best arouse us, in our memory, into youthfulness».

Clin. «Quite true».

Ath. «Should we then refrain from treating as entirely futile what most people say [657e] about those engaged in festivities – that the one who gives us the most delight and enjoyment should be thought most skilful and judged the winner? For since we give ourselves up to recreation on these occasions, we should give the greatest honour, and the prize of victory, as I said just now, to the one who gives the most pleasure to the greatest number of people. [658a] Isn’t this thesis correct, and wouldn’t things be rightly done if they were done in this way?»<sup>11</sup>

The discussion on pleasure as a criterion of judgment occupies a couple of pages in this section of the *Laws*, from 658e to 659c. The author starts by referring to the most common opinion among the audiences of contemporary performances, according to which the highest honour and the prize of victory should be awarded to the performer who affords the greatest enjoyment to the greatest number of people. Then, he proceeds to demonstrate his thesis through a *reductio ad absurdum*, arguing that if someone organizes a competition without qualifying or limiting it to gymnastic, musical or equestrian sports, assembles the whole population of the *polis* and offers a prize to the competitor who gives the greatest amusement to the spectators, the verdict will of course not be objective, but will depend on who is going to judge. As a consequence, if the tiniest children are to be the judges, for instance, they will award the prize to the showman of puppets (a fact which is obviously absurd – from the point of view of the speaker – within a competition which includes also rhapsodic, kitharodic and tragic performances!). This leads Plato to the main point of his argument here, that is, to

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<sup>11</sup> *Laws* 657d-658a (transl. Barker).

demonstrate that pleasure may well be a criterion for judging musical goodness. Nevertheless it can't be the pleasure of any chance person, but – rather – the pleasure of old and wise men. So the judges in musical contests must resist the applause of the masses and try to teach them what is right:

«Even I agree with the majority to the extent of saying that music should be judged by the criterion of pleasure, but not just anyone's pleasure. I would say that the best music is probably that which delights the best people, those who are fully educated (ἐκείνην εἶναι Μοῦσαν καλλίστην ἣτις τοὺς βελτίστους καὶ ἰκανῶς πεπαιδευμένους τέρπει), and especially [659a] that which delights the one man who is outstanding in excellence and education (τὸν ἀρετῇ τε καὶ παιδείᾳ διαφέροντα). That is why we say that judges of these matters need to be good men, in that they need to possess moral wisdom of all kinds, but courage especially. A true judge should not take instruction from the audience and his own lack of education; nor should he knowingly perjure himself, under the influence of cowardice or timidity, and give his judgment insincerely, through the very mouth with which [659b] he called upon the gods when he was setting out as an adjudicator. For the judge takes his seat, or properly should, as a teacher, not a pupil of the spectators (οὐ γὰρ μαθητῆς ἀλλὰ διδάσκαλος [...] θεατῶν), and as one who will stand up against those who offer the spectator pleasure in a unfitting or incorrect way (τοῖς τὴν ἡδονὴν μὴ προσηκόντως μηδὲ ὀρθῶς ἀποδιδούσι θεαταῖς). For under the ancient Hellenic laws it was not permitted to follow what is the present custom in Sicily and Italy, by which responsibility is given to the mass of spectators, and the winner is decided by show of hands: this practice has corrupted the composers themselves, [659c] since by composing for the depraved pleasure of the judges they have made the spectators their own teachers, and it has corrupted the pleasures of the audience too. For they ought always to be listening to things that are better than their own characters, and so improve their standard of pleasure, whereas exactly the opposite happens to them as a result of what they do now»<sup>12</sup>.

So, it results clear that all the previous reasoning of the Athenian Stranger was designed to identify the people who have to judge the musical *kalon*, that is, the chorus of elders. These people, if appropriately trained and educated, will then become arbiters of both 'aesthetic' and 'moral' taste in the citizens community. The Athenian concludes by saying:

«It seems to me that this is the third or fourth time that the argument [659d] has come round to the same place, to the thesis that education consists in

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<sup>12</sup> *Laws* 658e-659c (transl. Barker).

drawing and leading children towards what the law says is correct (ὀρθός), and is agreed to be correct in fact by the best and oldest, as a result of their experience (τοῖς ἐπιεικεστάτοις καὶ πρεσβυτάτοις δι' ἐμπειρίαν συνδεδογμένον ὡς ὄντως ὀρθός ἐστίν). So in order that the child's soul should not become habituated to enjoying and disliking things in defiance of the law and those who obey the law, but should follow it, enjoying and disliking the same things as an old man does, [659e] for these purposes there exists what we call songs (ἄς ᾠδὰς καλοῦμεν) [...]»<sup>13</sup>.

The identification of the judges with the oldest and wisest men will be more explicitly connected with the Chorus of Dionysus only later on (664b ff.), in a passage which many scholars have related to what we know of the Spartan choral tradition. See a passage in Plutarch's *Lycurgus*, from which we know that three choirs – corresponding to the three ages: *paides*, *akmazontes* and *gerontes* – performed at Spartan festivals:

«They had three choirs at their festivals, corresponding to the three ages, and the choir of old men (ὁ μὲν τῶν γερόντων) would sing first: “We once did deeds of prowess and were strong young men”. Then the choir of young men (ὁ δὲ τῶν ἀκμαζόντων) would respond: “We are so now, and if you wish, behold and see”. And then the third choir, that of the boys (ὁ δὲ τρίτος ὁ τῶν παίδων), would sing: “We shall be sometime mightier men by far than both”»<sup>14</sup>.

In much the same way, the Athenian (in *Laws* 664b-d) identifies three choruses: 1) the chorus of the Muses, which is composed of children (*neoi*); 2) the chorus of those up to thirty years old, which is called the chorus of Apollo *Paian*; 3) the chorus of those between the ages of thirty and sixty, that is, the chorus of Dionysus, composed by τὸ ἄριστον τῆς πόλεως, that is, by «the most trustworthy of those in the city by virtue of both age and wisdom (ἡλικίαις τε καὶ ἄμα φρονήσεσιν πιθανώτατον ὃν τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει)»<sup>15</sup>. These people, by singing the best things (τὰ κάλλιστα), are able to produce the greatest good (μέγιστ' [...] ἀγαθά) in the *polis*, since they possess «the highest capacity for the best and most beneficial songs (ὁ κυριώτατον ἂν εἶη τῶν καλλίστων τε καὶ ὠφελιμωτάτων ᾠδῶν)»<sup>16</sup>. However – the Athenian goes on at 665e-666a – since in becoming older everyone loses the confidence to sing songs, and enjoys it less because

<sup>13</sup> *Laws* 659c-d (transl. Barker).

<sup>14</sup> Plut. *Lyc.* 21.2 (transl. B. Perrin, *The Loeb Classical Library, Plutarch, Lives, vol. I: Theseus and Romulus. Lycurgus and Numa. Solon and Publicola*, Cambridge, Mass./London 1914).

<sup>15</sup> *Laws* 665d (transl. Barker).

<sup>16</sup> *Laws* 665d-666c (transl. Barker). Let's notice here the mingling, which will become clearer later, of the notions of κάλλος and ὠφέλεια

of shyness, they will be encouraged to be enthusiastic about singing by that «medicine which fights against the crustiness of old age (ἐπίκουρον τῆς τοῦ γήρωος ἀσθηρότητος [...] φάρμακον)», that is, by wine. Through it, «everyone whose disposition has been changed in this way will be more enthusiastic and less diffident about singing songs (ᾄδειν) or ‘incantations’ (ἐπάδειν), as we have often called them»<sup>17</sup>. As I said yesterday, this cathartic usage of wine and controlled drunkenness may be interpreted as intimately connected with both the religious setting of the dialogue and the Platonic assessment of irrational emotions as beneficial and necessary (when opportunely held in check) for the human soul. The power of wine to instill *aidōs*, on which Plato had started to reflect at the end of Book 1<sup>18</sup>, finds here its definitive connection with musical education.

In the last part of Book 2, Plato will focus his reasoning on the identification of the most important criteria of musical judgment for the elders, so that they may be able to select (and perform) the best and most beneficial songs for the city. In order to do this, he will take up some of the themes he has dealt with previously (even if not exhaustively), that is, the notions of musical ‘pleasure’ and ‘correctness’, blending them together and extending the talk to include an enquiry on justice, happiness and pleasure as inseparable ingredients of human life.

### **Plato and the Anthropology of Dance**

Before dealing with the view expressed by the author at 663a-b, where the Athenian asserts his own complete faith that justice, happiness and pleasure coincide (an important passage, in so far it provides the theoretical basis for the subsequent treatment of the three criteria of musical judgment), I would like to go back for a moment to a short and neglected passage:

Ath. «Do we then boldly state that correct procedure in music, and in recreation involving choric activity (τὴν τῆ μουσικῆ καὶ τῆ παιδιᾶ μετὰ χορείας χρείαν ὀρθῶν εἶναι), is something like this: we enjoy ourselves (χαίρωμεν) when we think that we are flourishing, and we think that we are flourishing whenever we enjoy ourselves? Isn’t that so?».

Clin. «Yes».

Ath. «And in such a condition, one of enjoyment (χαίροντες), we cannot keep

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<sup>17</sup> *Laws* 666c (transl. Barker).

<sup>18</sup> For a prescription of wine as a means to induce *aidōs* in the soul, see *Laws* 647e-650b.



still (ἡσυχίαν οὐ δυνάμεθα ἄγειν)?».

Clin. «That is so».

Ath. «[657d] Now isn't it true that those of us who are young are prepared to perform in choruses themselves, while those of us who are older think of ourselves as suitably occupied in watching them, enjoying their games and festivities (χαίροντες τῇ ἐκείνων παιδιᾷ τε καὶ ἐορτάσει)? For our nimbleness has now left us, and it is our nostalgic longing for it that makes us set up contests for those who can best arouse us, in our memory, into youthfulness»<sup>19</sup>.

This passage is clearly connected with the previous statement at 653d-e, where the author had said that «virtually every young creature is incapable of keeping still with either its body or its voice (τοῖς τε σώμασι καὶ ταῖς φωναῖς ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν οὐ δύνασθαι), but is always trying to move and make sounds, leaping and skipping as though dancing and sporting with pleasure (οἷον ὀρχούμενα μεθ' ἡδονῆς καὶ προσπαίζοντα), and uttering noises of every kind»<sup>20</sup>. While in that passage the consequences of such an assumption were the remark on the uniqueness of human beings in perceiving rhythmically ordered movements, and the interpretation of the establishment of choral performances as a key moment in the passage from a 'natural' towards a 'cultural' dimension in human life (thanks to the discipline exercised by *choreia* on the most irrational impulses of human beings), here Plato restates the 'naturalness' of movement for the young, and the importance of such a naturalness for understanding the beneficial effect of choral activity on them. This 'anthropological' perspective furnishes a further element to reinforce the Platonic (and, more generally, Greek) belief in the psychagogic power of *choreia*, which has the power to discipline not only the souls, but also the bodies of those who perform it (cf. 655b: ψυχῆς ἢ σώματος)<sup>21</sup>. Dance as such will in fact be discussed more in detail in Book 7, where Plato's account on *choreia* will focus on serious (*spoudaiai*) dances, among which he will identify two main kinds: the warlike or pyrrhic dance, and the peaceful dance, by him called *emmeleia*, both analyzed according to the mimetic theory<sup>22</sup>. But, once again, Book 2 seems to give a

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<sup>19</sup> *Laws* 657c-d (transl. Barker).

<sup>20</sup> Transl. Barker.

<sup>21</sup> See also *Laws* 656a: [...] κινεῖσθαι τῷ σώματι.

<sup>22</sup> The warlike dance (πολεμική or πυρρική) represents «the motion of fighting, and that of fair bodies and brave souls engaged in violent effort», while the peaceful one (εἰρηνική), the *emmeleia*, represents «the motion of a temperate soul living in a state of prosperity and moderate pleasures» (*Laws* 814e, transl. Shorey). Both dances, again, need to be disciplined and regulated by very strict rules, as is clearly stated in *Laws* 817e: «Let such, then, be the customs (ἔθη) ordained to go with the laws regarding all choristry

sort of ‘theoretical’ introduction to topics more fully discussed elsewhere in the dialogue.

Here, however, Plato makes also another interesting observation. He says that, if the young enjoy dancing for several reasons (their natural tendency to move, the beneficial effect of the dance on their souls and bodies, their pride in being part of a festivity in honour of the gods, and so on), the elders believe that they are more suitably occupied in ‘watching’ such an activity, because they can still enjoy themselves by observing it. The reference to the elders’ nostalgic longing for their lost nimbleness (τὸ [...] ἐλαφρὸν [...] ὁ ποθοῦντες καὶ ἀσπαζόμενοι) of course recalls to our mind literary themes developed by some great lyric poets of the archaic tradition. But by identifying such feelings with the origin of musical contests in Greek society, Plato clearly explains also how, for the Greeks, the educational processes connected with the dance don’t run out with the act of dancing itself. The importance of musical education and performance lasts even in older age, even if it has to be adapted to the new needs of a different stage in life.

### **The ‘Order’ (*taxis*) of *Rhythmoi* and *Harmoniai***

A third resumption of the theme concerning the natural tendency of the young to movements may be found at *Laws* 664e-665a. This interesting passage introduces what, I think, is among the first properly ‘technical’ definitions of *rhythmos* and *harmonia* in ancient sources:

«We said, if you recall, at the beginning at our discussion, that the nature of all young things is fiery, and is therefore incapable of keeping still with either its body or its voice (ἡσυχίαν οὐχ οἷα τε ἄγειν οὔτε κατὰ τὸ σῶμα οὔτε κατὰ τὴν φωνὴν εἶη), but is continually calling out and leaping about in a disorderly way (ἀτάκτως); and that while none of the other animals attains a perception of order in these two things, the nature of man alone does possess this. The name for [665a] order in movement is rhythm (τῆ δὲ τῆς κινήσεως τάξει ῥυθμὸς ὄνομα εἶη), and order of the voice, where high and low are mixed together at once, is given the name *harmonia* (τῆ δὲ αὖ τῆς φωνῆς, τοῦ τε ὀξέος ἅμα καὶ βαρέος συγκεραννυμένων, ἁρμονία ὄνομα προσαγορεύοιτο), while the combination of the two is called *choreia* [...]

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and the learning thereof (περὶ πᾶσαν χορείαν καὶ μάθησιν τούτων), keeping distinct those for slaves and those for masters (χωρὶς μὲν τὰ τῶν δούλων, χωρὶς δὲ τὰ τῶν δεσποτῶν), if you agree» (transl. Shorey).

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In the Platonic definition, both rhythm and *harmonia* are connected with the notion of ‘order’ (*taxis*). Rhythm is «order in movement» (since «rhythm occurs – Aristoxenus will say some years later – when the division of *chronoi* takes on some particular arrangement, *taxis*»<sup>24</sup>). *Harmonia*, instead, is «order of the voice», since a scale (if ‘musical’, Aristoxenus would say) displays a well-arranged mixture of high and low sounds<sup>25</sup>.

What is interesting to notice is that, while here the combination of the two is said to be the *choreia* (specifically described, in a previous passage of the *Laws*, as consisting of ὄρχησις and ᾠδή)<sup>26</sup>, in *Republic* Book 3 the union of words, *harmonia* and rhythm turns out to be the *melos*: «you can take this first step, and say that song is put together out of three things, words, *harmonia*, and rhythm»<sup>27</sup>. In the passage quoted in my previous lecture<sup>28</sup>, by contrast, *melos* was very carefully distinguished by the philosopher from the broader abstract term *harmonia*, that is, it was used as a more ‘practical’ term referring to the specific sequence of pitches used in some particular musical composition. The description of *harmonia* and *rhythmos* we find here in the *Laws* is very similar to the usage of the same terms in a passage of the *Philebus*, in which Plato displays a rather accurate and wide range of technical terms in the specifically musical field (even if the purpose of the passage is anything but musical):

«But suppose, my good friend, that you grasp the number and [17d] the qualities of the intervals related to high and low pitch of sound, and the boundaries of the intervals, (τὰ διαστήματα ὅποσα ἐστὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῆς φωνῆς ὀξύτητος τε περὶ καὶ βαρύτητος, καὶ ὅποια, καὶ τοὺς ὄρους τῶν διαστημάτων), and the numbers of *systemata* that have arisen out of them. These *systemata* were identified by people in the past, and they handed

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<sup>23</sup> *Laws* 664e-665a (transl. Barker).

<sup>24</sup> Aristox. *Rhythm*. 2.7 (transl. Pearson). For a similar definition, see the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* 19.38 (transl. Barker): «rhythm [...] is characterized by a recognisable and orderly number, and moves us in an orderly way».

<sup>25</sup> Aristox. *Harm*. 18.16 ff., p. 23.16 ff. Da Rios (transl. Barker): «But harmonically attuned melody (τὸ ἡρμοσμένον μέλος) must not only consist of intervals and notes: it demands also a way of putting them together which is of a special kind, and not haphazard, since it is plain that the property of being constituted out of intervals and notes is of a wider scope, belonging also to that which is harmonically ill-attuned (τῷ ἀναρμόστῳ)»

<sup>26</sup> *Laws* 654b (transl. Barker): «The choric art as a whole consists of dance (ὄρχησις) and song (ᾠδή)».

<sup>27</sup> *Resp.* 398c-d (transl. Barker): πρῶτον μὲν τόδε ἰκανῶς ἔχεις λέγειν, ὅτι τὸ μέλος ἐκ τριῶν ἐστὶν συγκεϊμενον, λόγου τε καὶ ἁρμονίας καὶ ῥυθμοῦ.

<sup>28</sup> *Laws* 655a.

down to us, their successors, the practice of calling them *harmoniai* (τὰ ἐκ τοῦ των ὅσα συστήματα γέγονεν ἃ κατιδόντες οἱ πρόσθεν παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν τοῖς ἐπομένοις ἐκείνοις καλεῖν αὐτὰ ἁρμονίας); and in the movements of the body they identified other, similar inherent features which, they say, we must measure by numbers, and call rhythms and measures (ἐν τε ταῖς κινήσειν αὐ τοῦ σώματος ἕτερα τοιαῦτα ἐνόητα πάθη γιγνόμενα, ἃ δὴ δι' ἀριθμῶν μετρηθέντα δεῖν αὐ φασὶ ῥυθμοὺς καὶ μέτρα ἐπονομάζειν), while being aware that this is how we should investigate every one and many. For when you grasp them in this way, [17e] then it is that you have become an expert (τότε ἐγένου σοφός); and when you have grasped any other one by investigating it in this way, you have by so doing understood it. But the indefinite plurality inherent in any kind of thing makes you, in each case, indefinite in your understanding, not numbered among persons of repute, since you have never turned your attention to number in anything»<sup>29</sup>.

Here we may find many technical terms which the subsequent theory will confirm as the standard musical terminology of technical treatises, widely and consistently employed from the fourth century BC onwards. Firstly, intervals are said to be *diastēmata*, that is, musical ‘distances’ in space; they circumscribe the musical pitch continuum through ‘boundaries’ (ὅροι), as will be clearly stated also by Aristoxenus in his *Elementa Harmonica*. Concerning the number and the qualities of intervals (ὀπόσα [...] καὶ ὀποῖα), let’s remember that, according to Aristoxenus, *diastēmata* may be classified according to their ‘size’ (*megethos*), in respect of their being concordant (*symphōna*) and discordant (*diaphōna*), composite (*syntheta*) and incomposite (*asyntheta*), rational (*rheta*) and irrational (*aloga*) and in respect of genus (*genos*). The ‘qualities’ of intervals may, perhaps, refer to their ‘character’ (*ēthos*), as may be inferred from what is stated by Aristides Quintilianus many centuries later: «The *harmoniai*», he says, «resemble either the intervals which are commonest in them, or the notes that bound them: and the notes in turn resemble the movements of the soul [...] it is through similarity that the notes both instil a character previously absent, in children and in older people too, and draw out a character that lay hidden within»<sup>30</sup>. Scales are said to be *systemata*, that is, ‘combinations of *diastēmata*’. It is clear that in Plato’s time, such a term had already replaced the older notion of *harmonia*, even if the conceptual frame of all these metaphors concerning the musical ‘space’ will be explicitly developed only in the second part of the century by Aristoxenus. Furthermore, the concepts of rhythm and

<sup>29</sup> *Phileb.* 17c-e (transl. Barker).

<sup>30</sup> Arist. Quint. *De mus.* 2.14, p. 80.23 ff. W.-I. (transl. Barker).

meter are appropriately separated<sup>31</sup>.

Plato, then, looks very well aware of the development of technical terminology and concepts in the theoretical musical discussions contemporary with him, and his approach to more technical details (though not fully developed, due to his lack of interest in the topic in itself) looks quite consistent in all his writings.

### **Justice, Happiness and Pleasure: The Theoretical Basis for the Criteria of Musical Judgment**

Let's go back to the *Laws*. At 663a-b, the Athenian asserts his own complete faith that justice, happiness and pleasure coincide:

«So then the teaching which refuses to separate the pleasant (ἡδύ) from the just (δίκαιον), good (ἀγαθόν) and beautiful (καλόν) helps, if nothing else, to induce a man to live the holy and just life, so that any doctrine which denies this truth is, in the eyes of the lawgiver, most shameful and most hateful; for no one would voluntarily consent to be induced to commit an act, unless it involves as its consequence more pleasure than pain»<sup>32</sup>.

This statement (introduced by a rather long argument, which runs from 662c to 663a, at the end of which he concludes that the just life must be the most pleasant, since the two are inseparable)<sup>33</sup> stands as the theoretical basis for a clearer understanding of the following reasoning concerning the three mentioned criteria of musical judgment, confirming a recurrent procedure within this Platonic treatise (according to which its author tends to give in advance theoretical 'preliminaries' to topics more fully discussed further on in the dialogue). Again, it is clear how, for the late Plato, the notion of pleasure (when 'correctly' disciplined) was strictly interwoven with the notion of ethical utility. In the *Laws*, the young's souls must be persuaded (πείθειν τὰς τῶν νέων ψυχάς) and not obliged to follow what would do most good to the State (τί πείσας μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ἐργάσαιτο ἂν πόλιν)<sup>34</sup>, and the duty of the whole State is to charm itself

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<sup>31</sup> For a similar terminological and conceptual distinction, see Aristoph. *Clouds* 635 ff.: [...] πότερον περὶ μέτρων ἢ περὶ ἐπῶν ἢ ῥυθμῶν;

<sup>32</sup> *Laws* 663a-b (transl. Bury, adapted).

<sup>33</sup> *Laws* 662d (transl. Bury): «Is the most just life the most pleasant: or are there two lives, of which the one is most pleasant, the other most just?».

<sup>34</sup> *Laws* 664a (transl. Bury): «Here, indeed, the lawgiver has a notable example of how he can, if he tries, persuade the souls of the young of anything, so that the only question he has to consider in his inventing is what would do most good to the State, if it were believed; and then he must devise all possible means to ensure that the whole of the community constantly, so long as they live, use exactly the same language, so far as possible, about these matters, alike in their songs, their tales, and their discourses».

unceasingly with incantations:

«That every adult and child, free and slave, female and male, and the city as a whole, must sing incantations to itself of the sorts we have described, without ceasing (ὅλη τῆ πόλει ὅλην τὴν πόλιν αὐτὴν αὐτῇ ἐπάδουσας μὴ παύεσθαί ποτε ταῦτα ἃ διεληλύθαμεν); and that these should be continually altered, providing variety of every kind, so that the singers have an insatiable appetite for the hymns, and enjoy them»<sup>35</sup>.

Let's note here the recommendation of 'variety', which is a new remark. Of course it has to be understood as a variety within the fixed norms governing the different musical forms appropriate to each god, and to each of the festivals which are assigned to specified days in the year. This is clearly stated in Book 7:

«First, they [i.e., the lawgiver and the law-warden] should determine the festivals (τὰς ἑορτάς), putting together for the year a list of which festivals should be held at which times, in honour of which individual gods, which children of the gods, and which demi-gods. Next they should determine which song ought to be sung at each of the sacrifices to the gods (ἐπὶ τοῖς τῶν θεῶν θύμασιν ἐκάστοις ἦν ᾠδὴν δεῖ ἐφουμνεῖσθαι), and what sort of dancing should adorn the various sacrifices (καὶ χορείας ποίαισιν γεραίρειν τὴν τότε θυσίαν). These ordinances should first be made by certain persons; and then all the people should join in common sacrifice to dedicate them to the Fates and to all the other gods, consecrating each of the songs, with a libation, to the appropriate gods and other beings (σπένδοντας καθιεροῦν ἐκάστας τὰς ᾠδὰς ἐκάστοις τῶν θεῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων). If anyone brings forward other hymns or dances beyond these for any of the gods, the priests and priestesses, with the guardians of the laws (μετὰ νομοφυλάκων), will be acting with both religious and legal propriety in excluding him; and the man who is excluded, if he does not accept his exclusion voluntarily, will be liable for the whole of his life to prosecution for impiety (ἀσεβείας) by anyone who wishes»<sup>36</sup>.

In the next lecture we will hear which is (or ought to be) «the best kind of song» (ἡ καλλίστη ᾠδή)<sup>37</sup> that those in charge of such a duty should sing (that is to say, 'the law'), and the criteria by which they may judge its 'appropriateness' for safeguarding the State.

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<sup>35</sup> *Laws* 665c (transl. Barker).

<sup>36</sup> *Laws* 799a-b (transl. Barker).

<sup>37</sup> *Laws* 666d-e (transl. Barker): «[...] the truth is that you have had no experience of the best kind of song (τῆς καλλίστης ᾠδῆς). For your constitution is that of an army rather than that of townsmen [...]».