

Music Theory And Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Eikadistes" of May 26, 2019 at 8:53 PM

I can agree that the intentional, *storytelling art of sound* we call **music** does not have "by itself" any inherent "power" besides the mechanical energy of a waveform, because **music** requires an audience who can interface with the acoustic narrative. If--like the crew of the Voyager--we are unable to interface with a composition that seems alien, then the narrative will be lost to us; thus, the "power" of **music** is only apparent to the human soul which interfaces with it. To those who *can* interface, the "power" is in our minds' ability to remember, and to imagine (not some mystical dimension or forms).

It's exactly like spoken language: if Elli speaks to me in Greek (of which I am not fluent), then my experience of her speech is simply the experience of a human female making labial, alveolar, velar, and glottal noises from her mouth, in my direction. Her **words (music)** therein have no "power" (because I cannot interface with them), and are reduced to grunts (sound). Certainly, if her grunts are meant to convey "Run! There's a fire!" then her words would have enough "power" to stir my soul to pump adrenaline through my muscles so I can escape the flames (but that's my mind, not her noises).

Sound "by itself" can only stir the senses to perceive. Indeed, it "'is unthinkable [...] that sounds which merely move the irrational hearing [faculty] should contribute'" or, conversely, corrupt the virtue nested within the soul of the listener. The soul's capacity to process mechanical energy through the eardrum, and relay it as various volumes of pitches does not require the mind to identify those mechanical impulses as anything except for the experience of processing mechanical energy as sound. Agreeably, "it is impossible to imitate things by voice and sounds; it is only possible to imitate their voices and sounds", because an event is an event, not a sound. Only a sound is a sound. Only a song is a song--that's why the music that **does** have "power" over us is what we remember from youth: it's not *music* anymore, it's *memory*.

This observation also demonstrates how violent video games are not the cause of mass shootings, and why gangster rap is not responsible for inner city violence--only personalities who can interface with that media can cause violence. The media, itself, is without any inherent moral or ethical dimension. We don't have any 'Justice' bosons that create 'Moral Fields' in which those ethical particles can be measured. The "power" of these things begins and ends with the subject's mind. "[I]t is possible for varying impressions to be received corresponding to predispositions".

I wish Philodemus were still around to tell Marvel and DC fans to respect each others: "[T]hus both in the case of the [scales] people differ, not in respect of the irrational perception, but in respect of their opinions [...], some [...] saying that [one] is solemn and noble and

straightforward and pure, and the [other] unmanly and vulgar and mean, while others call the [one] severe and despotic, and the [other] mild and persuasive; both sides importing ideas which do not belong to either scale by nature."

The author elaborates on a few things I mentioned in the original posts, where Plato calls the Phrygian mode *sober* and *resigned*, while Aristotle thought it to be "ecstatic". He includes another anecdote that "Plato associated our modern key of C major with sorrow, weakness and self-indulgence, while Helmholtz associates it with brightness and strength, and Pauer with purity, innocence, manliness, and other virtues." For context, John Lennon's song "Imagine" was written in C major. As one of his sources wrote, "the whole matter is one of subjective imagination [...] based in the first instance on association".

It sounds like *Musicis* is to *Acoustics* what *Astrology* and *Alchemy* are to *Astronomy* and *Chemistry*. We can expect materialists to be critical of the *musicis* tradition--it attempted to equate the moral ideals implied by spoken words with the geometric ratios of acoustic instrumentation. Philodemus was correct to accuse the practitioner of this tradition of "seeking a knowledge of the non-existent", just as Epicureans were correct to accuse Platonists of seeking non-existent Forms, and correct to accuse religious populations of superstitiously responding to delusional fears.

Philodemus responding to Platonic and Peripatetic interpretations of modes reads to me like a physicist in the 1990s using a technical analysis of acoustics to show Biggie Smalls and Tupac how stupid the East Coast-West Coast hip hop rivalry was. *Music, itself*, is not emotional, because **we** are emotional. *Music, itself*, is not ethical, because **we** are the agents of ethics.