

# Music Theory And Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Hiram" of May 29, 2019 at 3:51 PM

Alright so here is what I wrote years back about Philodemus' scroll on music:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/reasonings-on-philodemus-on-music/>

Here, he says that the origins of dance were unthinking, uncontrolled, as if by nature:

## Quote

It is not true that the men of yore exercised in dance ... with the purpose not only of seeing their bodies gain utility and to reach the dispositions of good people ... but also to carry in their soul equally the good performance that they saw manifesting throughout their bodies, and to try to keep their soul constantly beautiful for the rest of their lives.

In fact, neither of these reasons was the origin of humanity's first impulse to dance, or of its transmission by those who received it ... It was, on the contrary, their ignorance of nature and exultation that brought them to form, **in a manner that was instinctive and unthinking**, as if forced, a circle in order to produce with their hands, their feet, and other parts of the bodies the organized movements ...

This, again, is consistent with the tendency in Epicurus and Lucretius to assign the origin of many cultural forms to nature **ORIGINALLY**, which then **AND ONLY AFTER** was refined, perfected, and developed rationally by culture.

Concerning our questions about the therapeutic use of music, he argues that people who can't sing or dance are able to be virtuous, so he rejects the idea that **ONLY** the irrational aspect of music is therapeutic (he words it like this: "provides harmony to the soul").

He also argues that **ONLY** reason "softens our souls and would deprive us of our savagery". He juxtaposes reason and **UNREASON** for comparison, accusing unreason of inventing things that are 1. not "produced by nature", and 2. have no importance.

These are the direct Philodemus quote that I lifted from the scroll:

## Quote

If they say that only these irrational realities provide harmony to the soul, then their error is double: it means those who can't sing or dance, or who are unfamiliar with music, can't be virtuous.

... And those that say that we are sweetened by music because she **softens our souls and would deprive them of their savagery**, one may consider them perfect imbeciles. **In fact, it is only reason-because she teaches that none of the strange things that unreason invents has been produced by nature and that, furthermore, nothing of what she produces has any importance-that can perfectly reach this result**, once it has attained its perfection, and while she is still on the path to perfection, it can alleviate in proportion.

... The Epicureans do not underestimate music for lack of culture; to them, only philosophy counts.