

Music Theory And Epicurean Philosophy

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We are animals thrown up by the seeds of things, before we are philosophers. Children wailing helpless on the shores of life, before we are men and women. Music doesn't affect us like philosophy does, but it certainly affects us. It affects us like sunlight and verdure, like clear air and space to move in. Penicillin will cure the fool as easily as the wise man, but none will argue for that that it is not medicine. It will purge the disease, but it will not make you strong. You've got to make yourself strong, with discipline and purpose.

With music, you may interrupt the mind's endless restless anxiety. You may take a pause to purge for a time your own fretful neuroses, and begin, in the intervals, to clarify your thoughts. Coming to your senses in a literal way, you will have calmed the turbulence of the mind, and primed the pump of thought for wise recollection. That will be the time for discipline, and right reason. That will be the time to bathe your mind once again in the precepts of true philosophy.

It is true that we frequently squander those moments of elevation, and true that they are not a sufficient condition of happiness. But as men are not gods, we are not always in a mood receptive to wisdom. When I'm frustrated and angry, I am closed off to wisdom. But a little later, when the heart rate has settled and the amygdala calms down, I look back and see how silly I was a moment ago. We need that withdrawal, from stress and anxiety and struggle. Music, and conversation, and wine, and a walk in the garden may move us into a such a state. Music cultivates the soil of the mind--it will not grow into good on it's own, but if one takes the opportunity to nurture the seed of philosophy in that rich loam, can it fail to bear fruit?