

Music and the Soul: Destroying or Restoring the Inner Man

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Some Quotations on MUSIC

Plato (4th century BC):

“As Damon says, and I am convinced, the musical modes are never changed without change in the most important of a city’s laws.” *Republic* 424c (Trans. Grube. Hackett Publishing, 1992)

“Aren’t these the reasons, Glaucon, that education in music and poetry is most important? First, because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace, so that if someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, then the opposite. Second, because anyone who has been properly educated in music and poetry will sense it acutely when something has been omitted from a thing and when it hasn’t been finely crafted or finely made by nature. And since he has the right distastes, he’ll praise fine things, be pleased by them, receive them into his soul, and, being nurtured by them, become fine and good. He’ll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he’s still young and unable to grasp the reason, but, having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself.” *Republic* 401d-402a

“Imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought.” *Republic* 395d

“[The man who engages in illicit sexual behavior] will be reproached as untrained in music and poetry...” *Republic* 403c

“...when lawlessness has established itself there [in music and poetry], it flows over little by little into character and ways of life.” *Republic* 424d

“But when children play the right games from the beginning and absorb lawfulness from music and poetry, it follows them in everything and fosters their growth...” *Republic* 425a

“In their mindlessness they involuntarily falsified music itself when they asserted that there was no such thing as correct music, and that it was quite correct to judge music by the standard of the pleasure it gives to whoever enjoys it, whether he be better or worse.” *The Laws* 700e

“But as it was, the opinion that everyone is wise in everything, together with lawlessness, originated in our music, and freedom followed. People became fearless, as if they were knowers, and the absence of fear engendered shamelessness. For to be so bold as not to fear the opinion of someone better, this is almost the same as vile shamelessness, and springs from an excessively brazen freedom.” *The Laws* 701a.

Aristotle (4th century BC):

“Besides, when men hear imitations, even apart from the rhythms and tunes themselves, their feelings move in sympathy.” Pol. VIII.5, 1340a14-16 (*Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed., McKeon. Random, 1941)

“The habit of feeling pleasure or pain at mere representations is not far removed from the same feeling about realities.” Pol. VIII.5, 1340a24

Regarding the importance of good music: “Since ... virtue consists in rejoicing and loving and hating aright, there is clearly nothing which we are so concerned to acquire and cultivate as the power of forming right judgments, and of taking delight in good dispositions and noble actions.” 1340a17

St. Boethius (500AD)

“Music is part of us, and either ennobles or degrades our behavior.”

St. Basil the Great (4th century)

“What did the Holy Spirit do when he saw that the human race was not led easily to virtue and that, due to our penchant for pleasure we gave little heed to an upright life? He mixed sweetness of melody and doctrine so that inadvertently we would absorb the benefit of the words through gentleness and ease of hearing, just as clever physicians frequently smear the cup with honey when giving the fastidious some rather bitter medicine to drink. Thus he contrived for us these harmonious psalm tunes, so that those who are children in actual age as well as those who are young in behavior, while appearing only to sing would in reality be training their souls.”

St. Thomas Aquinas (13th century)

“Now it is evident that the human soul is moved in various ways according to various melodies of sound, as Aristotle states (Polit. viii, 5), and also Boethius (De Musica, prologue). Hence the use of music in the divine praises is a salutary institution, that the souls of the faint-hearted may be the more incited to devotion. Wherefore Augustine say (Confess. x, 33): ‘I am inclined to approve of the usage of singing in the church, that so by the delight of the ears the faint-hearted may rise to the feeling of devotion;’ and he says of himself (Confess. ix, 6): ‘I wept in Thy hymns and canticles, touched to the quick by the voices of Thy sweet-attuned Church.’” S. t. II II 91.2

Vatican II

“The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy. Sacred Scripture, indeed has bestowed praise upon sacred song. So have the Fathers of the Church and the Roman pontiffs who in more recent times, led by St. Pius X, have explained more precisely the ministerial function exercised by sacred music in the service of the Lord.” *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, #112.

OTHERS:

“If you would know if a people are well-governed, and if its laws are good or bad, examine the music it practices.” Confucius (500BC)

“One quick way to destroy a society is through its music.” Lenin

“My true belief about Rock ‘n’ Roll—and there have been a lot of phrases attributed to me over the years—is this: I believe this kind of music is demonic. A lot of the beats in music today are taken from voodoo, from the voodoo drums. If you study music in rhythms, like I have, you’ll see that it is true...”
Little Richard (an influential rock artist)

“We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has gone through. I do not think wide circles of American Society or wide circles of the Christian community realize this fully. We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-church, of the Gospel versus the anti-gospel.” (Nov 1978 Karol Cardinal Wojtyla [Pope John Paul II])