

MUSICAL ART AS ENLIGHTENMENT AND
UNDERSTANDING THROUGH ETHOS:
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE “HUMAN”

One of the most elevated plans of the spiritual life, so hard to catch and to reproduce through words, musical art is a “world” that needs to be known and understood. It is a “world” that deserves to be searched by the philosophical organon. Thus, we can find something of the “absolute Truth” as the “identity of the artistic-musical Beauty and the moral Good”. Actually, there is here an interweaving of the aesthetic and the ethical ideal, the registering of man as human, a synthesis of values and principles for an existence in liberty and dignity, in the logos, in order, in supreme harmony.

The philosophical-hermeneutic search of music – in the “unity of composition-performance-audition” – shows us the power of this art to open forever new horizons to cognition and understanding, to the shaping of the human. Here is an extraordinary power for communication and creativity even in the terms of the ethical doctrines centered on the categories: “utility”, “pleasure”, “happiness” – respectively, Utilitarianism, Hedonism and Eudaemonianism – essentially, a hypostasis of the deep meanings of the human, such as aspiration, but also such as settling down in life. And, thus, a kind of achievement, the awarding of sense to our existence in its ethical dimension occurs.

It’s not easy to discuss music.

The approach, by way of words, to the *musical art* is marked by consciousness of the difficulties of submitting it to investigation and trying to explain it in verbal language, owing to the ineffable and intimate and infinite in the musical experience and the constant metamorphosis by which music sustains them. Striking root in the pure intuition, having the Idea as object – in Plato’s sense, as the essential and the eternal in all the world’s phenomena – music is the objectifying “of the whole will which constitutes the world”. (Schopenhauer 283) Owing to the features of phenomenality and temporality, music is substance and permanence, surviving beyond the phenomenal world, in the most profound structure of the whole of existence. The musical art *works into being*, in the space of the “intelligibility” – that “noetós tópos”/νοητος τοπος of the philosophy of the ancient Greeks.

The expression of art through sounds, *music* means penetration and striking root into essence, the redeeming of the essence, integration in “logos”, in the

plenitude and dynamism of the becoming. It displays a unique capacity to impersonate the most diverse aspects of reality, the complex and contradictory character of life; actually, the enlightenment of the truth of life. Especially, seeing that the musical art is a peculiar “world” – an expression of *ethos/ηθος* – a realm that strives for the achievement, the awarding of sense, and, last but not least, for assurance of the lastingness of artistic works.

Music is a fundamental presence in everything that lives. Some way or another, everywhere, we can find rhythm, harmony, and movement, correlated with the basic element of sound.

This art of sound has developed in connection with the cultural and moral evolution of man. It accompanied him, expressing him with the highest degree of accuracy, in what was always most significant to him: *his humanity*, specifically, in the felt tension between what *he “is”* and what *he “should be”* and what *he “would like to be”*.

Real and ideal are here interwoven. More than that, in this *particular way of being: music*, we find the human’s passing from one living state to another, the balancing of the concrete and abstract configuration. Music is a complex experience, a perpetual work and adventure of the spirit, an eloquent sign for man as situated in “mystery” and, also, “revelation of the mystery” – as the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga (in his *Trilogia cunoasterii* 74 – see the note on his “trilogies” in “References” 77) conceives the “ontological mode of human being”; and, thus, music opens on the most profound dimension of being: the *moral* realm, with its axiological and normative unity.

As state-of-being-in-the-world, music is a framework for bringing in value, for projecting and recognizing the *human*; it is a mode of human communication. In music is the discovery of the human being, with his conflicted nature; here is the imagining and assimilating of the ideal he is capable of attaining. Touching man in his essence and dynamism, music elicits a direct echo in him, persuasively reinforcing the idea that the art has a high moral importance for his existence. Music gives to man the urge to make, in freedom, something noble and admirable, lasting and grand, something that speaks in the most expressive way about the man’s situation in this world, about the sense of human creation.

Music is a special “*lógos*”/λογος, calling and sitting on the horizon of meaning. In an immediate relation with philosophy, the musical substance is built, generally, on those philosophical-moral ideas, simple and at the same time great: *the dignity of man, merit/areté, the value of Human Life; the meaning of life*. In the being proper to music, there is man with his capacity for (his own) creation, (his own) perfection, for permanent endeavor toward

self-fulfillment; man with his capacity to give (himself) existential sense within the horizon of true values – that dialectical identity of the Ancients: *the Beautiful, the Good, and the True*, in the classical Greek paradigm of *καλλον και αγαθον, και αληθης* (*kállon kaí agathón, kaí aléthes*).

The art of sound is re-presentation, an essential one for the Human. For the one who lives the experience of music, the labor is one of sensory-emotional comprehension (first of all, while listening), of meditation on what was heard and fixed in memory, and after that, reasoning in order to judge. This path passes from initial vagueness and spontaneity to clarity and the integration of the substance. *The ethos of music* is one of becoming conscious, of amazement and interrogation, of raising problems. Contemplating the sensible musical reality, we secure access to authentic being. The route is *from* and only *through* sensible existence to the essential “*to be*”.

The emotion of the musical phenomenon works in connection with the noblest living and with philosophical reflection. Thus, it becomes possible to understand the truth that *music means the creation of a world and integration into it, an independent world, logical and beautiful in an absolute way, a noble world, perfectly ordered. Music is a possibility, a promise and even an introduction to the world of something that did not previously exist and would otherwise remain non-existent, something that man aims at as an ideal being.* Passing through the senses (and only by this way), from the first impressions (in musical hearing), it overruns the natural condition: This means the affirmation of the spiritual value of man risen up to the level of meditation and understanding. Thus, there is developed his power to claim his proper *dignity/αξια* (*axía*), his *virtue/αρετη* (*areté*) – which sustains *progress/προκοπη* (*prokopé*). Therefore, in terms of a phenomenology of musical art, it is necessary to consider these: its defining features, its genesis and purpose, the message contained in it, the ways of achieving through it the “being”/man as composer, performer, listener, as one “who has Being in rapport with Being” in Heidegger’s words.

The content of music is made up of fundamental experiences of being, of ethical experiences first of all, with the duality that characterizes them, with the conflict, but also with the reconciling: *the equilibrium, the supreme harmony.* Was not music designated by the Greeks: *αρμονια/αrmonía*?

Beyond the phenomenon of music, we can find what is general and more profound in its meaning. Here is the revelation of hidden sense, the enlightenment of an original principle, of a pure state, of intelligibility: the relation with music supposes the living of a thorough “moral experience” (see Rauh), as the *Human* one is. Subjects who approach music by themselves

approach superior values. In stirring states of consciousness that are very different, music has remarkable qualities allowing the recovery of the essence of man in the right reason of being, in his most beautiful qualities. Through those, he rises to the level of “harmonious life”, that *ομολογοθμενος βιος* (*homologouménos bíos*) of Stoic philosophy (Diogenes Laertius VII). He causes to triumph the “best part of him”/ *αριστος* (*aristos*), as a “regal man”: wise and temperate/ *σοφον και σωφρον* (*sóphon kaí sóphron*), righteous/ *δικαιον* (*dikaion*), sovereign, free/ *ηγεμονιχον* (*hegemonikón*), gaining some of the “great honor”/the *κοσμος* (*cósmos*) itself according to Socrates, the spokesman for Plato in *The Republic*.

Music is able to summon up acknowledgement of, and endear hearers to a referential world, a real *human* one, a world that man needs for living and through which he takes the specific measure of his *nobility* and *dignity*. Through the part that music plays in individual and social life, this art gives expression, determines and develops moral feeling, relating us to the ideal – that of the supreme Good / *το αριστον* (*ariston*). It fosters a motivation for being, a superior one: that of continuous *humanization*.

A wave that overwhelms (and, here, there is something of the mystery of music), this art of sound proves to be an unrivaled force for expressing, for exalting, for giving greatness and brightness to the feeling for life, inspiring aspiration to a superior state. Specifically, music sustains faith in a “meaning of life” as a morally supreme value, which implies an ensemble of preferences and exigencies that open the option of the *human way of being*. If it be well guided – a condition spotlighted still by the Ancients, in the theory of the “ethos of armonía” – music is an extraordinary, a privileged positive influence that leads to *Truth* and the *Good*, to *wisdom, love, freedom, duty, happiness*. Containing life’s contradictions, music is a way of outrunning them, of *attaining equilibrium*. Here is what Tolstoi perceives in art, in general: “a moral organon of human life” (Tolstoi 266).

Our belief is one built on the *valence music possesses to draw out the moral sense*; herein, we pursue finding its real being.

A fine emanation of the spirit, musical art galvanizes subtly the *ethos of life*. It inspires noble, lasting, profound feelings. It orders them and lends perspective to them. These feelings in their turn have a strong influence on thinking and the will. Attitudes and demeanor are determined by them. Music is a source of moral meditation, of perpetual inspiration in the sense of the *authentic general human values*. Moral edification becomes the aim. Such a view reveals the *identity of artistic-musical Beauty and moral Good*. The lesson conveyed by music, having origin in its constitutive elements of

rhythm, interval, measure etc., is that of listening to and following the rules of supreme Harmony. This seeding of man's soul, when it has crystallized the conscious understanding of "world harmony", binds the individual to that harmony. Being sensitive to the harmony of musical structures, man gets a clearer conception, he thinks more of the order and communion he is in need of. Disciplining his spirit, he can be enlightened as he searches and understands some of life's truth, of the foundational principle of his condition; he can become more conscious of the greatness and nobility he is capable of.

As a source of spiritual satisfaction and happiness, music proves to have a utilitarian character for the progress of the human being; it has an ethical usefulness, which amplifies the artistic Beauty that sustains its validity. Even the liberating function of music is one of the moral restoration of man. On the horizon of an ideal he is able to project *humanity / το φιλανθρωπον (philánthropon)*. An ethical and esthetic ideal shaped by musical art, *humanity* represents that which gives power to man, the science-wisdom of assuming the inherent hardships of his existence without remaining bound by these. On the contrary, they are overrunning – with sensitivity and, at the same time, strength. To do music (to compose or only to perform it), as well as to receive music are preeminent situations for the initiation of man into the mood of *humanity*.

For the subject who opens himself to music, this art offers the paradigm of the Beauty-Truth-Good identity, *a paradigm of the ideal: aspiration towards Beauty, which represents the supreme Good and the absolute Truth* – as Plato emphasized in his *Dialogues*. The whole history of musical art testifies to the affirmation and endurance of those works that prove – beyond any haphazard condition – to accord with the desires and commands of high psycho-socio-cultural signification, having for their reference in the ensemble of these three Values – the key idea of humanism.

"Harmony", "measure", "fair proportion", "perfection in shape": *Musical art* – being produced by a noble force – contributes substantially to the fulfillment, to the flourishing of the human. Actually, the original Hellenic term: *αρμονια* meant beauty, fairness, pleasure and utility, peace, a state of "good", happiness. Music means gladness that is by occasion useful given its orientation to what is noble, to what can brighten the soul and the mind, what is exemplary and deserves effort, which impels us toward morality, stopping more easily the inclination to and contacts with "evil".

In music, we can perceive aspects of a moral *Utilitarianism*, as well as of a *Hedonism*; and more, aspects of a *Eudaemonianism*. Musical art has

developed owing to its *utilitarian* character, one obvious during the oldest periods; gradually, its *hedonistic* and *eudaemonist* characters came to the fore. Mainly touching the senses but in the end an intellectual-philosophical exercise, music brings forth *pleasure/ηδονη (hedoné)* – in a spiritual sense, one tending towards *happiness/εὐδαιμονία (eudaimonía)* – ecstasy. At the same time, it is possible through music to discipline the mind, to enlighten perspectives on “reason”, “just measure”, “order” – those aims so much appreciated by the ancient philosophers: the *λογος-κοσμος (logos-cósmos)*, the precept of Delphi: *μηδεν αγαν (medén agan)*. It is possible through music to effect a change in one’s soul, to change one’s practical plan of behavior. This art generates and grows *spiritual pleasure*. It opens a way of *living usefully and happily*. Asking for a complex, generous and deep *understanding*, it also imparts a “science” centered on *respect for law* and consequently lays the ground for a *dignified human life*.

From ancient times till now, we recognize in music a certain utility as seen in the benefits of chant. The therapeutical, curative effect of music means, essentially, the assurance of a psychosomatic equilibrium and of a “moral health”, the achievement of a balanced state and harmony (inside and outside of *man, in auto- and hetero-relations*). Through that harmony is structured the *human* as a value-ideal. Even only as entertainment, music represents an opportunity to forget, at least for the time being, the worries and bellyaches of existence. The musical work, the fundamental acts of music (composition, performance, audition) are real ways “susceptible to rescuing us into joy”, that “joy of being” “affirmed by everyone, every moment” – according to Simone de Beauvoir (de Beauvoir 196).

Through music – through its ethos – man gives to himself the chance to experience a superior *pleasure*, one real, pure, natural and necessary *pleasure with a view to the good* – so that Plato (in *Philebus* and *Timaeus*) and Epicurus (*Letter to Menoeceus*) have granted it priority; a *pleasure* “which perfects activity” as Aristotle says (*Nicomachean Ethics* VII), owing to the purification accomplished by the music, the beauty of this art being in accord with spiritual nobility.

Man lives a special delight by music – a peculiar manifestation of the aspiration towards the Good; music as well touches the Good and also *happiness*. And this is because of the “joy of integrity and authenticity”, of “balance and harmony” that are achieved as a man becomes able to learn the true meanings of music, to reach some of the “wisdom of being”, given that music has an internal resonance and promotes accord between man and world as well. It is a substantial amplification of the *human*.

The aspects of a moral Hedonism and a Eudaemonianism in musical art received early recognition in the theorizing of the ancient Greeks about art in general, in Aristotle's conceptions of *mimesis/μιμησις, poiesis/ποιησις* and *catharsis/καθαρσις* (*Poetics*). We refer, certainly, to his speaking of "the songs that purify the soul", that "give us a harmless joy" (Aristotle, *Politics* 206).

Through artistic-musical creation, we find something about the meaning of *happiness, eudaimonia* – a value that has always concerned the human spirit. Musical works cement the correlation of a system of values, which is very important for the essence of human being – on the individual and social planes of existence. These are values that enable man to flourish, to maximize his state of well-being, to achieve happiness and, thus, to receive a revelation of truth (*Plato, Phaedo*). Above all, cultivation of the soul aims at a kind of refinement (*mousiké, mousikón/μοθσικη, μοθσικον* signifies even "culture" in opposition to *amouón/αμοθσον*). The art of sounds – in its truthfulness – reveals a "world" perfectly consonant only with a perfect soul, enlightening into Truth, unable to participate in "evil" (in any hypostasis thereof). This harmony cannot at all take part in disharmony – as we read in *Plato's Phaedo*.

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