Aristotle and Musicologists on Three Functions of Music

A Note on Pol. 8, 1341b40-1

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Abstract

In Pol. 8, we find two rather different threefold divisions of the aims, or usages, of music. At the very beginning of his analysis, Aristotle first lists (1339a11-26): amusement and relaxation; moral education; leisure. Strikingly enough though, when it comes up again at the end of the treatise on musical education, this threefold division has undergone a few remarkable changes. Now, the division comes up between moral education, emotional purification/purification, and “thirdly”, Aristotle says, “leisure, rest and relaxation of one’s tensions (τρίτον δὲ πρὸς διαγωγὴν πρὸς ἄνεσίν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν)” (1341b36-41). The main difficulty that this new enumeration creates is notable: how to explain that now the third aim of music seems to consist in the ensemble of leisure, repose and relaxation, while leisure and relaxation were first introduced as two distinct aims? I argue that πρὸς διαγωγὴν should be best considered a gloss.

Keywords

Aristotle – musicologists – music – leisure

In Pol. 8, we find two rather different threefold divisions of the aims, or usages, of music. At the very beginning of his analysis, Aristotle first lists (1339a11-26): amusement (παιδιά) and relaxation (ἀνάπαυσις), the former being for the sake of the latter (ἡ δὲ παιδιὰ χάριν ἀναπαύσεως ἐστιν, 1337b38-9); virtue (ἀρετή), or as he will say, παιδεία, ie moral education; leisure (διαγωγή). This is apparently a firm and definitive division which he repeats a little further along: music aims εἰς παιδείαν ἡ παιδιάν ἡ διαγωγή (1339b13-14), each of these aims being a genuine one, depending on the circumstances and persons involved. Strikingly
enough though, when it comes up again at the end of the section on musical education, this threefold division has undergone a few remarkable changes. Now, the division comes up between moral education, emotional purgation/purification (παιδείας ἕνεκεν καὶ καθάρσεως), and “thirdly”, we read, “leisure, rest and relaxation of one’s tensions (τρίτον δὲ πρὸς διαγωγὴν πρὸς ἄνεσίν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν)” (1341b36-41). The main difficulty that this new enumeration creates is quite notable: how to explain that now the third aim of music seems to consist in the ensemble of leisure, repose and relaxation, while leisure and relaxation were first introduced as two distinct aims?

Curiously enough, most recent English translations do not seem to have noticed the problem, and translate the transmitted text literally and without further ado (which is also the text that the three last editors, Ross, Dreizehnter and Aubonnet, have printed)—the most recent one, by Reeve, reads “and third, for leisured pursuit, for rest, and for the relaxation of one’s tensions”.¹ But as R. Kraut acknowledges in his important Clarendon commentary, “It is likely that the manuscripts do not here convey what Aristotle originally wrote” (Kraut 1997: 209).² For, not only does that second division not match the first one, but also, and more alarmingly, it flatly contradicts it. In his first division of the aims of music, relaxation and amusement are like sleep and wine: they are supposed to give us some rest after hard work or heavy stress, or, as Aristotle says citing Euripides, “put an end to our worries”; consequently, they have nothing to do with “serious matters (σοφοὶ τῶν σπουδαίων)” (1339a16-19). Quite to the contrary, music for leisure is closely associated with intelligence (πρὸς φρόνησιν, 1339a25-26), being an “intellectual pastime” as some have translated it, which (whatever that may exactly amount to) makes it a rather “serious” and highly valuable usage of music (taking σπουδαῖος to mean both “serious” in opposition to amusing, and valuable in opposition to worthless, or at least less worthy). That distinction was already announced in the strongest manner at the very beginning of Aristotle’s defense of his plan for a perfect city. There

¹ Reeve 1998: 240. Other translations have a similar rendering (eg. Lord 1984, Simpson 1997). Many previous English translations proposed the same sort of non-committal reading (eg. Barker 1946: “a third is benefit of cultivation, with which may be linked that of recreation and relaxation from strain”). This is also the case in other languages—again, I guess, because of the authority of the three main editions in use. See eg. Pellegrin 1990: 542: “… et en troisième lieu, elle [la musique] sert à mener une vie de loisir et à se reposer de ses efforts”.

² While he points to this, Kraut himself proposes no solution and translates the transmitted text. This is also what Susemihl & Hicks did in their 1894 edition, resolutely writing that it is not “possible to reconcile the three advantages attendant on the use of music here with the three ends of musical education enumerated” earlier (608, n. 40), and yet they print the received text.
(1337b33-38a6), he opposed activities for the sake of the amusement that suit workers who indeed need relaxation after hard work (ὁ γὰρ πονῶν δεῖται τῆς ἀναπαύσεως) to activities for leisure (using synonymously the verb σχολάζειν, the phrase ἐν τῇ σχολῇ διαγωγή, and the word διαγωγή), that suit “free men”, that is, citizens who do not need to work. “Being able to enjoy noble leisure is the core principle of everything (σχολάζειν δύνασθαι καλῶς. αὐτὴ γὰρ ἀρχή πάντων μία)” (1337b31-32), Aristotle says emphatically: music is one of these “things” that constitute the truly happy life of those free citizens of his perfect city. In its most valuable usage, music must not be something “useful” properly speaking (such as a means toward recovery from hard work) but an end in itself, which can only be enjoyed in a leisureed life and by “free men” (1338a13-32). Linking music for amusement and relaxation, and music for leisure would amount to downplaying, even denying, everything Aristotle has hitherto said to defend and promote his views on the true, perfect happiness the citizens of his best possible city should be supposed to enjoy. Thus, what may appear to be a small philological or exegetical quibble actually points to a crucial issue, indeed the very core, of Aristotle’s proposal when it comes to describing the perfect happiness that only a well-conceived musical education of young people makes possible.

Editors have proved too cautious in editing the transmitted, yet highly problematic, text and many translators have followed them blindly. However, several emendations have been proposed, especially by late 19th and early 20th century English and German editors and commentators. First of all, and before considering any exegetical issue, the Greek of the transmitted reading sounds philologically odd as we would normally have expected something between πρὸς διαγωγήν and πρὸς ἄνεσίν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν. Some scholars have tried to save the transmitted text by taking πρὸς ἄνεσίν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν to be the explanation of πρὸς διαγωγήν, as Rackam does in his Loeb translation: “and thirdly it serves for amusement, serving to relax our tension and to give rest from it”. But as Newman had already remarked in his 1902 annotated edition, if such a reading follows common Greek where διαγωγή often meant “pastime” or “amusement”, it would ignore the specifically Aristotelian usage of that term throughout this book of the Politics, and would in fact contradict what we have read in Aristotle’s first

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3 This was also Bernays’ reading: “drittens zur Ergötzung, um sich zu erholen und abzuspannen” (1880: 7). Alternatively, Saunders (1981: 473) considers relaxation as the means to διαγωγή: “and (iii) to promote civilized pursuits, by way of relaxation and relief after tension”.

4 Aristotle too knows this common usage: see NE 1127b33-34: Οὗς ἐκ καὶ ἀναπαύσεως ἐν τῷ βίῳ, καὶ ἐν τῇ διαγωγῇ μετὰ παιδίας.
enumeration, where he firmly distinguished amusement and leisure. In the *app. crit.* of his Teubner edition, Immish contrariwise suggests adding μὲν οὐ after πρὸς διαγωγήν, amounting to reading: “and thirdly, it is not for leisure, but for repose and relaxation”. But if this suggestion underlines the difference between these two kinds of aims, it would be very strange to have Aristotle here denying what he previously stated, namely that besides amusement and moral education, there is also a third kind of aim, leisure. Newman himself, following a suggestion made by Susemihl, suggested adding an ἤ before πρὸς ἄνεσίν.5 This would be a very light emendation that would allow us to maintain the distinction between leisure and relaxation. As Schütrumpf (who also endorses this suggestion) rightly notes, this would mean that these two aims must form a sort of generic unity opposed to the unity formed by moral education and *katharsis* (2005: 651). But that would in turn contradict the way Aristotle has presented this division so far: in fact, if there is a unity between two of these aims, it should rather be between relaxation and purgation, or purification, which are both described as a sort of medicine (compare 1339b15-7 about relaxation: τῆς γὰρ διὰ τῶν πόνων λύπης ἱατρεία τίς ἐστιν; and 1342a8-11 about katharsis: ἐκ τῶν δ’ ἱερῶν μελῶν ὄρωμεν τούτους [. . .] καθισταμένους ὡσπερ ἱατρείας τυχόντας)—one for working people who need to recover from hard work, and the other for emotional people who need to restore their emotional balance. As for relaxation and leisure, it is true that Aristotle at one point recognizes that both share the fact of being very pleasant (1339b15-19). But being pleasant is a general feature of music, and music for moral education must be pleasant too if one wants it to have a real effect on the moral dispositions of youth (1340a14-18). Thus pleasure cannot be taken as a criterion that would link amusement and leisure in any particular way. In fact, in his first division, Aristotle does present leisure as yet another, quite distinctive aim to be added to amusement and moral education (καὶ γὰρ τούτο [ie leisure] τρίτον θετέον τῶν εἰρημένων, 1339a25-26)—and indeed, it is Aristotle’s main argument, which he vigorously states (in fact against Plato), that only leisure provides the framework for our appreciating music for itself, and not as a means toward a further end, such as recovery from hard work in the case of relaxation, and improvement of one’s dispositions in the case of moral education (see especially 1338a11-13; and 1339b25-27). Finally, following Zeller (1921: 771), one might be tempted to read a τέταρτον, “fourthly”,

5 Interestingly enough, this is a suggestion Susemihl made in the *app. crit.* of his 1872 Teubner edition, which he then inserted into the Greek text in his 1879 Greek-German edition with Engelmann. (Moerbeke’s translation: tertio autem ad deductionem ad remissionem que et ad distensionis requiem, might tempt one to infer that he read either ἤ or καί before πρὸς ἄνεσίν; in fact though, que et is Moerbeke’s usual way of translating τε καί).
before πρὸς ἄνεσιν, which would avoid the critiques made against the previous suggestions. But that reading, reasonable as it may at first sight appear, would be very much at odds with both the threefold division of the aims of music made previously, and more immediately with the threefold division between songs (μέλη), or tunes (ἁρμονίαι), which is at stake in this passage, ie between τὰ μὲν ἡθικά, τὰ δὲ πρακτικά and τὰ δʹ ἐνθουσιαστικά (1341b34).6

Before I come back to how I suggest we should read 1341b40-1, let me face a related problem that this last solution brings to the forefront, namely why Aristotle now introduces katharsis as a further aim of music, one that was not mentioned, or alluded to, at all in his first division. Actually, here Aristotle does not present this threefold division between tunes or songs as his own: this is a division that has been proposed by “some people who are experts” in music (τινὲς τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ, 1341b33), that is, we may suppose, people seriously working on music theory, whom we would nowadays call “musicologists” (such as Aristotle’s own disciple Aristoxenus). In other words, Aristotle is not restating his own division of the aims of music, and therefore is not adding a further aim to those he described earlier; he is reporting a division those experts have proposed, and katharsis was one of the three aims of music they have enumerated. To be sure, Aristotle does say that he endorses their division. That, we may suppose, is because it at least partly implements the division of the aims of music he has been proposing and defending all along. Indeed, that is the reason why he goes on to review these kinds of songs, or tunes, one by one: “frenetic songs” (ἐνθουσιαστικά) are suited to emotionally unbalanced persons (and perhaps to anyone who may be affected by violent emotions from time to time too); “reinvigorating songs” (πρακτικά) for working people; and finally, “right-minded songs” (ἡθικά), that is Dorian songs (and not Phrygian ones as well, as Socrates wrongly asserted in the Republic), are what we need for the moral education of youth. Those songs implement Aristotle’s own division of the aims of music, with reinvigorating songs for relaxation from hard work, and right-minded songs for the moral education of youth. (As for katharsis, we

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6 For the sake of completeness, I should also mention the proposal Hicks & Susemihl offer in an excursus (1894: 638-39): they suggest reading ταύτης δ´ πρὸς διαγωγὴν ἢ πρὸς ἄνεσιν καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν, taking ταύτης to refer to καθάρσεως at b38, which would mean that katharsis works as the means to both leisure and relaxation. Besides its requiring a rather heavy change in the text, this is a very implausible solution: how would katharsis work as a means to leisure since Aristotle has so strongly insisted that learning to play the aulos (which is of course the instrument for ecstatic music) cannot help us in developing our intelligence (πρὸς τὴν διάνοιαν οὐδὲν ἐστιν ἡ παιδεία τῆς αὐλήσεως, 1341b6-7) while music for leisure is “for the sake of intelligence” (πρὸς φρόνησιν, 1339a25-26)?
may surmise that Aristotle considered that aim to be part of relaxation, both being essentially restorative like medical remedies).

If we take this seriously into account, one firm conclusion should offer itself, from which one philological proposal on the strange formulation of 1341b40-1 must follow. As we can see from the text itself, it is the case that those music experts don’t mention anything like a special tune or song that would correspond to music for leisure; as I have just said, the three kinds of songs, τὰ μὲν ἴθικὰ τὰ δὲ πρακτικὰ τὰ δ’ ἐνθουσιαστικά, are those best suited to moral education, relaxation and purification/purification respectively. Thus, the most obvious conclusion that is to be drawn is that those music experts quite simply never thought, let alone explicitly spoke, of leisure as a special, distinct aim of music. Hence, the philological proposal that logically follows (and which as a matter of fact was proposed long ago by James Welldon in his 1883 translation of the Politics but, as far as I am aware, was never followed by anyone else): πρὸς διαγωγήν should be best considered a gloss.7 Read without those two words, τρίτον δὲ πρὸς ἄνεσίν τε καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῆς συντονίας ἀνάπαυσιν is philologically flawless and makes perfect sense. Ἄνεσίς and ἀνάπαυσις come as the third aim of music after παιδεία and κάθαρσις, which in the rest of the chapter Aristotle links to the respective tunes musicologists have distinguished. Reversing the order of his announcement, he reviews first the ἐνθουσιαστικά (1342a4-15), then the πρακτικά (1342a15-28),8 and finally the ἴθικά (1342a28-b17).

Of course, when one proposes deleting a reading, especially when it is the only reading that we find in all our MSS, a plausible explanation must be given as to why someone would have invented it. The reason why some ancient

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7 Welldon translates the phrase under discussion: “and thirdly for the relaxation or recreation of the tense condition of the soul”, barely indicating in a footnote: “Omitting πρὸς διαγωγήν” (1883: 245).

8 Reading with Sauppe (followed also by Ross, but not by Dreizehnter and Aubonnet) πρακτικὰ at 1342a15 instead of MSS καθαρτικὰ. Following Schütrumpf (see his very helpful note ad loc), I take 1342a16-28 to be the explanation of how those “reinvigorating songs” contribute to relaxation for workers. Generally, translators who keep the awkward—and unparalleled in Greek literature—MSS καθαρτικὰ consider those lines as constituting another paragraph, but they then lose the continuity, and in fact the very meaning, of Aristotle’s argumentation in this whole discussion of songs, or tunes. For a detailed defence of the MSS καθαρτικὰ, see esp. Lord 1982: 132-4, who argues, quite unconvincingly to my mind, that these καθαρτικὰ are meant to refer to the frenetic songs that normal people do enjoy without harm, and without undergoing the curative katharsis mentioned earlier. It is much more natural to refer that “harmless pleasure” (χαρὰν ἀβλαβῆ, 1342a16) to the reinvigorating songs (see 1339b25-27: “harmless pleasures are suitable not only because they promote the end of life, but because they promote relaxation too”), which Plato would have quite evidently considered harmful.
reader felt himself entitled to add those words may be plausibly reconstructed as follows. Reading the sentence without the words πρὸς διαγωγήν could have easily left one wondering why διαγωγή, which has so far been so prominently defended, is conspicuously absent in this analysis. Thus, such a reader might have felt the need to write those words down, most probably in the margin of his MS—perhaps with a question mark, indicating his perplexity as to why διαγωγή was missing. It should then come as no surprise that a later copyist using that MS did not hesitate to insert it into the text: as διαγωγή commonly meant amusement, or entertainment, and since Aristotle himself presented διαγωγή as the third section in his first division of the aims of music, adding the words πρὸς διαγωγήν to the text may easily have been seen as a happy solution that would make the two divisions seem congruent with one another. (As we have seen, quite a few respectable modern scholars have tried to justify this reading, too).

The emendation of the text I propose after Welldon is not only required by the context, where Aristotle discusses moral education, katharsis, and relaxation, but not at all leisure. It also has an important philosophical dimension. It prevents us readers from confusing διαγωγή with entertainment or amusement,9 and highlights the importance and originality of Aristotle’s own understanding of what διαγωγή amounts to in his grand picture of perfect happiness: when it comes to the value of music and its importance in human life, one should consider music as an end in itself, not simply a means toward something else, and therefore as part and parcel of the end of human life, happiness.10 No one else among his predecessors, be they philosophers (such as Plato who defended music only for moral improvement) or music experts, ever proposed such a usage for music. Adding the words πρὸς διαγωγήν into that sentence obscures the most original and interesting idea Aristotle defends in his own version of musical education. Admittedly, even emended, our text still leaves us with the pending question of what type of song, or tune, might correspond to that usage of music. This is a question that one may suppose Aristotle must have asked himself. Emending the text in the way I have defended should

9 This is a confusion that even Andrew Barker demonstrates in his otherwise excellent translation of this passage in his Greek Musical Writings: he there translates our text, “and thirdly at amusement for the sake of relaxation and relief from tension”, while he had translated παιδιά (notably at 1339b15) by the same word, ‘amusement’ (Barker 1984: 180 and 174 respectively).

10 On the originality of Aristotle’s approach on music for leisure, see especially Nightingale 2004: 240-252.
force us interpreters to reconstruct what his answer might, or should, have been; but this is not a task I shall attempt to undertake here.\footnote{\textsuperscript{11}}

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\footnote{\textsuperscript{11}} I have offered such an attempt in Destrée forthcoming. I am very grateful to Armand D’Angour and the GRMS anonymous referee for their remarks and insightful suggestions.