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Without music life would be a mistake: ‘Ohne Musik wäre das Leben ein Irrthum’. So, famously, wrote Friedrich Nietzsche in the first section (‘Maxims and Arrows’) of Twilight of the Idols. As always, Nietzsche had deeply personal reasons for the force and pathos of this aphorism; music did indeed help to keep him alive. His words also betray an impulse, I think, to modify Schopenhauer’s pessimistically unqualified statement in Parerga und Paralipomena that ‘human existence must be a kind of error’. But over and above those motivations, we can detect in Nietzsche’s stark utterance, I would like to suggest, a trace and resonance of Greek feeling. We might even wonder whether in formulating his maxim Nietzsche was subconsciously remembering the passage in Plato’s Philebus where Protarchus, asked by Socrates whether music, as one of the ‘impure’ arts, is needed for the mixture of a humanly desirable life, says that he certainly takes it to be necessary—‘at any rate’, as he puts it, ‘if our life is really to be a life of some kind’ (εἴπερ γε ἡμῶν ὁ βίος ἔσται καὶ ὅπωςον ποτε βίος, Pl. Phlb. 62c). Without music, Protarchus supposes (and he seems to take the idea to be practically self-evident), human ‘life’ would hardly be worth the name at all. And
it is Socrates, despite his lofty disdain for the philosophical ‘imprecision’ of music’s technical resources, who prompts him to that conclusion.

Whether or not Nietzsche had this Platonic passage at the back of his mind when composing his own aphorism, we have strong justification for treating the question whether human life needs music as an authentically Greek concern: a concern which encompasses not just ‘music’ in the narrower denotation of the word but the whole of mousikê as the collective realm of the Muses and their contribution to the enhancement of existence.\(^4\) If the Muses can be thought of as the divine source (or at least a projection onto the divine)\(^5\) of distinctive forms of experiences, even forms of life, then one way of enriching our understanding of what they stand for is to engage with Greek reflections on what happens when they are absent from the lives either of individuals or of social groups. What I aim to do in this chapter is to treat the idea of a life lived without the Muses (or even, at an extreme, in denial of them) as a way of broaching some of the issues involved in attempts to identify and make sense of Greek conceptions of the ‘value of aesthetics’.

The lack of any one-to-one correspondence between modern uses of ‘aesthetic(s)’ and the vocabulary of Classical Greek is a complex matter. But the complexity is not all the result, as sometimes alleged, of an ancient conceptual deficit; it arises just as much from the uncertainties and obscurities which attach to the modern terminology itself. I do not myself believe that there is anything like a stable modern understanding of ‘aesthetics’ or ‘the aesthetic’, only a set of competing models and values. There is no such thing as the ‘purely aesthetic’; attempts to demarcate one come up against the multiplicity of both psychological and cultural factors which enter into all the relevant areas of experience. If we want to clarify the relationship between ancient and modern patterns of thought on this subject, we need to allow for a plurality of (partially overlapping) vocabulary, ideas, and imagery. We also need to be prepared to think dialectically: which is to say, be prepared to expose our own conceptions of what counts as aesthetic value to the force of various ancient arguments and attitudes, rather than reasoning from a fixed paradigm of the aesthetic. Part of the importance of

\(^4\) For one account of the concept of mousikê, see Koller 1963, 5–16.

\(^5\) Greeks not only treat human experience of ‘music’ as a gift of the Muses; they see the Muses as integral to the gods’ pleasure in their own existence. See, among much else, Pind. fr. 31 (Snell–Maehler), where the Muses are brought into being to satisfy a divine request to ‘adorn’ (κατακοσµε/uni1FD6ν) Zeus’s world-order in song. For one reading of this Pindaric fragment, see Pucci 1998, 31–34.
ancient forms of ‘aesthetic value’, as I see it, resides precisely in their resistance to the modern presumption of a single, neatly circumscribed sphere of aesthetic experience. I have tried to undertake that kind of dialectical thinking for one major ancient concept (or ‘family’ of concepts) in my book *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*. In the present chapter, I propose to treat notions of *amousia*—itself hard to translate by any single term, but embracing various failures and/or refusals to cultivate the values of ‘music’ (*mousikê*) and the Muses—as a clue to certain Greek ways of thinking which have a special bearing on the problems of aesthetics.

I shall be concerned not only with the terminology of *amousia* itself but also with a cluster of ideas and values with which it is associated or comes into contact. At the core of my argument will be the thesis that Greek culture gave rise to a conviction that to live ‘without music’ (to which the phrase μετ’ ἀνουσίας, soon to be encountered, provides a close approximation) is to lack something essential to the most fulfilling kind of human existence: to lack, indeed, a particular type of ‘life-value’. On this view, if the Muses and their extended domain of *mousikê*, are absent or neglected or even repudiated, then in some way *the whole of life* will be affected by that negative condition. This is not a claim that one can (or should try to) expound systematically on the basis of our Greek sources; it is not so much a doctrine as a sensibility, an outlook on life. But one can find hints and pointers towards it in many places. The present analysis will discuss three main test cases: first, the evidence of Euripidean usage, and above all a lyric passage which expresses the idea of life itself as somehow needing the gifts of the Muses (though voicing this idea within a context of inescapably tragic irony); secondly, two examples from Aristophanes which lend a characteristic twist of comic paradox to the notion of *amousia* and kindred terms; thirdly, a selection of passages from the dialogues of Plato, who pays a kind of compliment to the ‘musical’ values of his culture, but at the same time reinterprets and revalues them for his own purposes, by converting the idea of *amousia* into part of a distinctively philosophical ‘aesthetic’, making it a concept of what is lacking in the life/soul which lacks the ability to respond authentically to non-material forms of beauty and truth.

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6 See Halliwell 2002, esp. 1–14, for my general approach to the history of ‘aesthetics’; cf. Halliwell 2009 for a résumé of my view of ancient thought as usefully resistant to modern paradigms of aesthetics as a single domain.
2. Euripides and Tragedy's Rejection of amousia

The origin and earliest uses of the adjective amousos, as well as of the near-synonymous apomousos, are now impossible to reconstruct. The first surviving occurrence of amousos is in Empedocles 81 B74 DK, a single-line fragment in which an unknown feminine subject, often assumed to be the cosmic force of Love (Φιλία), is described as ‘leading the unmusical tribe of prolific fish’. While we can be confident that the significance of amousos here includes the idea of ‘silent’ or ‘without speech’, the lost context makes the word’s further connotations uncertain; but what is evoked may have been the thought of the whole ‘world’ of fish as one which blocks out the sounds of human culture, both speech and music. Rather different is the earliest occurrence of apomousos in a remarkable passage of Aeschylus’ Agamemnon in which the chorus recall the negative impression Agamemnon made on them when he originally led off the Greek army for Troy: ‘[you were] pictured in my mind … in exceedingly ugly colors’, ‘you were pictured very inartistically’, ‘you made a most unpleasing picture to me’, are three attempts to capture the thrust of the boldly metaphorical phrase κάρτες ἀπομοῦσως ἡσθα γεγραμμένος. One implication of this figurative usage is that there was already available by this date a conception of mousikê which encompassed sensitivity to visual art. Another is that the values of mousikê are symbolically charged with more than surface meaning. What disturbed the Argives who watched the army depart was not in fact something purely visual about Agamemnon but his whole demeanor and state of mind, exhibited above all in his sacrifice of Iphigeneia (herself compared by the chorus, in an earlier passage, to a piercingly pitiful figure in a painting). The flaws in the ‘picture’ of Agamemnon, as the Argive onlookers saw it, were flaws in the conduct of a life.

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7 φύλον ἄμουσον ἄγουσα πολυπερέων καμασῆνων. Tr. Inwood 2001, 253 (his fr. 82); Graham 2010, 1, 391 (his no. 137) translates amouson as ‘uncultured’. For one possible context in the poem, see Guthrie 1965, 206 n. 2.

8 Cf. ‘speechless’ (ἀναστόδων) fish at Aesch. Pers. 577, Soph. fr. 762, and the saying ‘dumber than fish’, ἀφωνέτερος τῶν ἤχῳν at Lucian Somn. 1. Note a different evocation of the marine world in the phrase ‘unmusical melody of the seashore’ (ἄμουσον ἀκτῆς … μέλος), TrGF 2.703b.11, which may be post-classical.

9 Aesch. Ag. 801, with translations by Fraenkel 1950, I, 139 (cf. his discussion, ibid. II, 363); Denniston and Page 1957, 139; Collard 2002, 23.

10 See Aesch. Ag. 242, where the image of a gagged Iphigeneia who can nonetheless strike the onlookers through the eyes seems to play on something akin to Simonides’ famous description of painting as ‘silent poetry’ (see esp. Plut. Mor. 346F, 748A).
Even after making allowances for gaps in our evidence, it is striking that after the two passages noted above the great majority of the other dozen or so surviving fifth-century occurrences of amousos (and apomousos)11 are concentrated in Euripides, who apparently had a penchant for the vocabulary of amousia and whose work illustrates the subtlety of its semantics.12 The terminology in question can refer directly to aspects of musical performance, denoting for example the cacophonous, drunken singing of figures such as Heracles and Polyphemus. Even in these cases, however, the quality of being amousos, though an attribute of the vocal sounds themselves, implies something about the condition or character of the singer: something temporary in the case of Heracles (a musically ambiguous figure in general—a fact which will recur below), something more intrinsically and irredeemably bestial in that of Polyphemus.13 This implication is elsewhere strongly underlined by passages in which amousia is a negative attribute that extends explicitly beyond music as such into the wider realm of character and conduct. In a fragment from Euripides' Ino, someone takes it as a mark of amousia to fail to shed tears over pitiful things, treating the trait, in other words, as a kind of emotional insensitivity, though one with readily recognizable implications for responsiveness to poetry, song, and music.14 Ion, in the play named after him, is induced by what he regards as a virtually

11 Eur. Med. 1089, 'not strangers to the Muse' (Page 1938, 151), ὀὐκ ἀπόμουσον, describes that minority of women, including themselves (cf. 1085, 'we too have a Muse', ἕστιν μοῦσα καὶ ἡμῖν), whom the chorus take to have the cultured education and wisdom to compete with a male understanding of life: the passage implies a conception of mousikê which, once again, combines ideas of musico-poetic sophistication and a broader 'culture' of the mind. Cf. Mastronarde 2002, 346–348. For ἀπόμουσος cf. also n. 13 below.

12 The only surviving attestation from Sophocles has the form ἀμοῦσωτος, which may mean 'without having heard the music': see fr. 819 with Pearson 1917, III, 47 for Mekler's speculation about the lost context.

13 Heracles 'howls' (an animal metaphor) 'unmusically', άμουσω φλακτῶν, at Eur. Alc. 760 and likewise in fr. 907 (where the musical standard is bad enough for 'a barbarian to notice'); for his musical ambiguity, see section 3 with n. 46 below. The same term, άμουσα, describes Polyphemus' singing at Eur. Cyc. 426 (cf. 489–490, quoted in my text below). A further point shared by Alc. 760–762 and Cyc. 425–426 is the evocation of clashing sound registers: rowdy celebration set against weeping. The Sphinx's 'songs' at Eur. Phoen. 807, an ironic metaphor for her riddle, are 'most unmusical' (ἀμουσοτάταις mss., emended to ἀπομουσοτάταις for metrical reasons by Nauck).

14 Eur. Ino, fr. 407, άμουσα τοι μηδ' ἐπ' οἰκτροίσιν δάκρυστα ἐστὶν. Cf. Eur. El. 294, only the wise person (σοφός), not the ignorant (ἀμωθής), feels pity: see Denniston 1939, 85; Dover 1974, 119–123; Bond 1981, 134–135 for the cluster of associations which this exemplifies. Qua 'insensitivity', amousia would probably have counted as one form of ἀνασθήσα (see Dover 1974, 59, 122–123; Diggle 2004, 333 for the scope of this concept), though no classical source makes the connection directly.
physical assault on him by Xuthus to generalize about those who are ‘uncultured and mad’ (ἀμουσίως καὶ μεμηνότας, Eur. Ion 526). Amousia, it seems, can be manifested equally by an absence or a surfeit of emotion.

Such passages point towards a flexible conception of amousia (moving easily between the literal and the metaphorical)\(^\text{15}\) which centers on a lack of sensitivity, sophistication, and finesses. The same is true of Euripides fr. 1033, in which one character evidently reproves another with the aphoristic statement, ‘to be obtuse is, in the first place, to display amousia’ (τὸ σκαιῶν εἶναι πρῶτον ἀμουσίων ἔχει). The conjunction with ‘obtuseness’ is informative. The adjective skaios, literally ‘left(-handed)’ and capable of conveying various shades of ‘crass’, ‘uncouth’, ‘inept’ or the like, is interestingly used in some contexts for insensitivity relating directly to musico-poetic art. The chorus at Aristophanes Wasps 1013 calls ‘obtuse’ (σκαίοις θεατοῦ) those spectators on whom the allusive significance of the play’s parabasis might be lost. This brings the term within a familiar discourse used by the comic poet to praise or blame his audiences for their sophistication and cleverness or lack thereof: skaios (stupid, inept, crass) is the contrary of both sophos and dexios, which between them cover various kinds of cleverness, adeptness, and sophistication.\(^\text{16}\) With skaios as with amousos, it is easy for the boundaries between various domains of activity to be blurred. Later in Wasps itself, Bdelucleon calls his father ‘obtuse and uneducated’ (ὁ σκαίε κάπαϊδευτε, Ar. Vesp. 1183) in an exasperated reaction to Philocleon’s lack of sympotic adeptness. The ‘aesthetics’ of the symposium are a combination of social and musical skills.\(^\text{17}\) Bdelucleon’s two adjectives resonate with this interplay of values.

As it happens, these same adjectives are applied to Polyphemus in a passage of Euripides’ Cyclops precisely with reference to that drunken singing which I have already mentioned is termed amousos elsewhere in the play.

\(^\text{15}\) For a notable case of metaphor, see Pl. Hp. mai. 292c, where ‘singing a dithyramb out of tune’ (διήρμησαν τοσσοντι προς εύτως αμουσίως) refers to giving a flawed answer to a conceptual question; cf. n. 62 below. The note on this passage in Tarrant 1928, 59 is potentially misleading (‘the word’ refers only to the adverbial form).

\(^\text{16}\) On Wasps 1013 and the comic poet’s treatment of his audience, see Imperio 2004, 270–271. For skaios and sophos as opposites see e.g. Eur. Med. 298–299, HF 293–300, Heracl. 458–459; for skaios and dexios (also spatial opposites qua ‘left’ and ‘right’: Pl. Phdr. 266a), see Ar. Vesp. 1265–1266 (with n. 17 below). Note also Pl. Resp. 411e2, quoted in section 4 below. On skaios, cf. Dover 1974, 120, 122; Chantraine 1956, 61–62.

\(^\text{17}\) Cf. Lissarrague 1990 for one approach to the idea of sympotic aesthetics, Ford 2002, 25–45 for another. When Amynias is called skaios at Ar. Vesp. 1266, it also seems to be for reasons related to his sympotic history (with a suggestion that he lacked the social-cum-musical finesse to maintain a place in wealthy circles like those of Leogoras).
The chorus dub Polyphemus ‘an uncouth non-singer’ (σκαιός ἀπωδός) who ‘tries to make music from hideous noise’ (ἀχαριν κέλαδον μουσιζόμενος) and needs ‘educating’ for shortcomings which are simultaneously musical and social. A character described as ‘uncouth and rustic’ (σκάιος ... κάγροικος) in a fragment of Ephippus for talking crudely is accused of perpetrating the linguistic equivalent of a lack of sartorial stylishness (something else, we recall, true of Philocleon in the symposium rehearsal in Wasps). In Aristophanes’ Clouds, Socrates brands Strepsiades ‘rustic and obtuse’ (ἀγρείος εἴ καὶ σκαίος, Ar. Nub. 655) for his inability, among other things, to grasp the technicalities of metrical rhythms (a subject Socrates thinks can make one ‘seem smart at social gatherings’ like symposia, κοµσαν συνουσία, Ar. Nub. 649). Notwithstanding the double-edged humor of this last passage, the force of the term skaios as denoting ineptitude across a wide spectrum of socio-cultural behavior is clear. And it is hard to challenge the speaker of Euripides fr. 1033 for bringing the term, as we saw, within the ambit of amousia.

The evidence so far gathered suggests that amousia was a concept with broad evaluative ramifications, some of which will reappear at various stages of my analysis. While it could apply in a strict sense to defects in musico-poetic knowledge or proficiency, it was also extendable to a lack of refinement, understanding, or sensitivity which manifests itself in different areas of personal and social behavior. As a result, the idea of amousia cuts across what modern categorization might demarcate as separate domains of aesthetic, emotional, educational, and ethical experience. In what was to become a practically proverbial passage from Euripides’ Stheneboea where the Nurse (?) says that ‘Eros teaches (someone to become) a poet, even if he was previously amousos’ (ποιητήν δ’ ἁρα / Ἐρως διδάσκει, καὶν ἄμουσος ἧ τὸ πρόν, Eur. fr. 663), it is not easy to hold cleanly apart two nuances of the adjective: one, a lack of aptitude for, the other a lack of any interest in, poetry. There are, moreover, hints in some of the passages already cited of a complementary implication, namely that the symptoms of amousia are not a matter of discrete features of a person but more like the disclosure (in the eyes of those who make the judgment) of the defective structure of a character, personality, or sensibility. Amousia can be thought of, in that sense, as the condition of a life and its values as a whole.

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20 See Collard et al. 1995, 94.
There is one further passage of Euripides which brings out that last point with eloquent clarity and which I would now like to consider in some detail, though without attempting to provide anything like an integrated reading of the text in its full dramatic context. In the second stasimon of *Heracles*, the chorus of elderly Thebans celebrate the recent return of the hero and the prospect of his family’s rescue from the tyrant Lycus. Picking up a theme from the end of their previous song (Eur. *HF* 436–441), they start by reflecting in the first strophic pair on the attractions of youthfulness (*νεοτας, ή βω*) and the corresponding oppressiveness of old age. Following on from those thoughts, the chorus then affirm, in the second strophe, their commitment to a life suffused with the values of the Muses (Eur. *HF* 673–686):

I shall not cease to blend the Graces with the Muses,  
loveliest of partnerships.  
May I never live without the Muses,  
may I always live amidst garlands!  
Old I may be, but I am still a singer  
who proclaims with full voice the goddess Memory

and still sings for Heracles  
the hymn of glorious victory  
along with Bromios giver of wine,  
along with the melody of seven-stringed lyre  
and Libyan pipes.

I shall not yet put aside  
the Muses who set me dancing.  

οὐ παύσωμαι τὰς Χάριτας  
ταῖς Μοῦσαις συγκαταμει-  

γνύς, ἠδίσταν συζύγιαν.  
μὴ ζωήν μετ’ ἀμουσίας,  
αἰεὶ δ’ ἐν στεφάνοισιν εἶνην  
ἔτι τοι γέρων ἀοίδὸς  
κελαδῶ Μναμοσύναν,

έτι τάν Ἡρακλέος  
καλλινικον αείδω  
παρά τε Βρόμιον οίνοδόταν  
παρά τε χέλυος ἐπτατόνου

Particularly marked here (making this another passage which might have been in Nietzsche’s subconscious when he wrote his own aphorism) is the feeling that a life without the Muses, a life of *amousia*, is radically impoverished and incomplete in value. The chorus of another, unknown Euripidean play (the fragment is sometimes speculatively assigned to *Antiope*), goes further still, counting a life without the Muses as a kind of death in life (Eur. fr. 1028):

> Whoever in youth neglects the Muses has perished for the whole of his past and is dead for the future as well.

> óστης νέος δὲν μουσών ἀμελεῖ
> τὸν τε παρελθὸντ’ ἀπώλει χρόνον καὶ τὸν μέλλοντα τέθνηκεν.

As with the remark of Protarchus in Plato’s *Philebus* (we need music ‘if our life is really to be a life of some kind’, section 1 above), the choruses of both these Euripidean texts voice a conviction that the realm of the Muses is no self-contained, detachable activity but a complete dimension of life itself, a dimension without which life would be badly diminished. A salient feature of the passage from *Heracles* is the expressive suggestion that what the Muses endow human existence with is a counterbalance to, and compensation for, the process of aging and dying: in a way which echoes many archaic Greek sentiments, the beauty of song resists and even transcends the condition of mortality. This point is all the more poignantly significant in the light of the chorus’s counterfactual thought-experiment in the first antistrope of the same stasimon that if the gods could adopt a perspective of human wisdom they would allow the good a second life, a second enjoyment of youth (διδύμον ... ἦβον, Eur. *HF*, 657) as a visible sign of their virtue. The transition from acceptance that this can never be so to the chorus’s double assertion, as aging singers (and, in the second

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22 LSJ s.v. ἄμουσια II translate the term at *HF* 676 oddly as ‘want of harmony’. The full force of ‘without the Muses’ is correctly seen by Lanata 1963, 176; Bond 1981, 239 (Euripides has ‘re-etymologized’ the word).

23 Cf. Wilson 1999–2000, 435 on ‘the regenerative powers of *mousike*’ in this passage, but setting it (433–439) against the imagery of destructive Dionysiac music which is to follow (cf. n. 30 below).
antistrophe, as a dying swan, Eur. *HF*. 692), that they will ‘never cease’ to dedicate themselves to the Muses, nonetheless transmits a subtle sense that the gifts of the Muses are a means of maintaining the value of a life in the face of its physical decline.\(^{24}\)

The state of mind expressed by the chorus in this ode makes the Muses part of an intricate web of values. They represent a kind of compound, compendious *mousikê* in which vocal song, instrumental music (of both strings and woodwind), celebration (with garlands, victory hymns, and wine), choral dance, Dionysiac intoxication (Eur. *HF*. 682), and Memory (itself symbolizing a mixture of cultural tradition, memorialization, and musical facility) are all intertwined. In a familiar kind of tragic self-reference, the chorus’s own performance embodies all these things in the theatrical moment itself, at the same time as the Theban elders avow them within the world of the drama.\(^{25}\) The conjunction of the Muses with the Graces (an old one, of course, and the legacy of a deep-rooted archaic Greek aesthetic) adds an expanded suggestion of radiance and pleasure which reinforces the idea that what the chorus devotes itself to is a ‘music’ tantamount to the fullness and fulfillment of life at its most beautiful.\(^{26}\)

One might aptly compare Pindar’s *Olympian* 14, a poem which on one level is about the power of song itself (including its capacity to transcend death, here by taking ‘news’ of the young victor’s success to his father in Hades) and in which the Graces are described as the source of *all* the pleasures and rewards (physical, intellectual, social—and above all ‘musical’) of both human and divine existence.\(^{27}\)

If one of the functions of the second stasimon of *Heracles* is to express and enact an ideal of aesthetic value, that ideal does not purport to be self-sufficient or detached from the rest of existence. The chorus are not voicing abstract feelings; their words have a social context and meaning: they are celebrating and memorializing a momentous event, the triumphant return of Heracles ‘from the dead’ as the latest achievement of his remarkable life. (They had surveyed his previous labors in the first stasimon of the

\(^{24}\) See Hardie 2004, 30–31 for the view that *HF* 657–666 evokes the symbolism of mystery religion. Mystery religion is certainly relevant to the play more generally (e.g. Seaford 1994, 378–381) but any resonance of it in this passage is obscured, to my mind, by the counterfactual pathos of the chorus’s sentiments.


\(^{26}\) For the Kharites and Muses together, see West 1966, 177 on Hes. *Theog*. 64; cf. e.g. Ar. *Av*. 782, Eccl. 974a, fr. 348 KA. On ‘blending’ (*συγκαταµειγνύσ*ς) the Graces with the Muses at *HF* 674–675, note the same verb at Xen. *Hier*. 6.2, where it denotes immersing the mind in sympotic celebrations (and escaping from life’s problems); cf. Halliwell 2008, 112–113.

play, Eur. *HF*. 348–441, which was at the same time a kind of lament for his descent to Hades.) Moreover, in the second antistrophe they claim an explicitly ethical function for their songs. Comparing themselves to the Delian maidens who perform paeans at Apollo’s temple on that island, they think of themselves (and in a sense assume the role of) singing a paean outside Heracles’ palace like a dying swan. In doing so they claim that ‘what is right is the foundation of my hymns’ (τὸ γὰρ εὖ/τοῖς ἕμοισιν ὑπάρχει, Eur. *HF*. 694–695). Song is an affirmation of more than its own pleasure; in the present case, it revolves around allegiance to Heracles as a bastion of excellence and a protection against various evils. That is why the stasimon ends with a resounding proclamation of Heracles’ status as a son of Zeus who has helped to rid the world of monsters and thereby made it safer for human life (Eur. *HF*. 696–700).

The ode as a whole, then, is a vehicle of self-consciously poetic and musical praise which situates itself within a cluster of interactive values: performative beauty of voice, instruments, and dance; intensity of pleasure in the awareness of how the Muses, in collaboration with the Graces, make possible a celebration of life in defiance of its physical failings and the prospect of death; and, finally, a commitment to ethical, religious, and social standards of virtue which can themselves be fitly memorialized in song. For these Theban elders, a life ‘without the Muses’, a life μετ’ ἀμουσίας (Eur. *HF*. 676), would indeed lack much more than music *stricto sensu*.

Yet what the chorus enacts in this ode (as well as in their almost ecstatic rejoicing over the death of Lycus, soon afterwards, in the third stasimon, Eur. *HF*. 763–814) is overcast by a terrible cloud of dramatic irony. There will soon be nothing left to celebrate about Heracles’ return or his relationship to the gods; quite the reverse. To consider what difference such tragic irony makes to the values espoused by the chorus would require, in a sense, a complete theory of tragedy itself. I shall have to limit myself, for present purposes, to the rather bald claim that it is precisely because tragedy is itself a form of experience which, for its own audience, depends profoundly on values of *mousikê* that the chorus’s deprecation of a life ‘without the Muses’ (μετ’ ἀμουσίας) cannot be, and is not, simply nullified by the appalling consequences of Heracles’ madness later in the play. That madness may itself be viewed through the imagery of perverted music and dance. The

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29 For tragedy itself as part of *mousikê*, note Ar. *Ran*. 797; cf. n. 48 below.
30 See esp. the ironic metaphors of music and dance at *HF* 871, 879, 889–890, 895, 925, 1303–1304, with Henrichs 1996, 60–62; cf. n. 23 above.
chorus will not, however, stop singing when they hear of Heracles’ crazed slaughter of his children. They will sing a different kind of song instead, a song of anguished lament (in the course of which they will refer again directly to the Muses).  

So in a deeply paradoxical way the tragedy as a whole bears witness, both dramatically and in its own performance, to the chorus’s continuing need for song and to their aversion to a life without the Muses. In that respect Heracles is ultimately representative of a central element in Attic tragedy’s intrinsic nature. Tragedy testifies, among much else, to the possibility of turning, and the need to turn, to the expressive resources of ‘song’ even in the face of the worst. For some of (though not all) the direct victims of tragic misfortune there may be only the silence of death, a silence specifically characterized by the chorus of Oedipus at Colonus as a loss of music (‘without the lyre, without dancing’, ἄλυρος ἄχορος, Soph. OC 1222). But within the larger dramatic world of tragedy, as well as in the genre’s performative relationship to its audience, there always remains space for a ‘music’ which even disaster cannot wholly destroy. Furthermore, behind this fundamental component of tragic poetics is an older Greek sensibility, which makes the Muses symbolic of the capacity of song not just to come to terms with, but to impose a kind of consoling order onto, all aspects of existence, including suffering and death. The image of the Muses singing a lament for the dead Achilles in Odyssey 24 is an instructive emblem of this point. The voices of the ‘real’ Muses are indefeasibly beautiful, and that is the aspiration of all human music too, including tragedy. Set against this larger background, the amousia which the chorus of Heracles deprecate so emphatically is a negation, we might say, of an aesthetic for, and of, life in its entirety.

3. Aristophanes and the Comic Ambiguities of amousia

There is, however, another side to the matter. The chorus’s aversion to amousia in the second stasimon of Heracles hints delicately at the idea that not everyone would necessarily feel as they do. Tragedy, as part of the ‘grand tradition’ of Greek poetry, is undoubtedly wedded to an elaborate

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31 HF 1022, though the text is vexed: see Bond 1981, 327. Note also the chorus’s self-conscious questioning about what kind of ‘song for the dead’ and ‘chorus for Hades’ they should sing: HF 1025–1027.


aesthetic of life-values. But did it speak for everyone in fifth-century Athens, or was the audience to which it appealed a pre-selected cultural elite? And even if we accept that Athenian theater to some degree represented an institutional democratization of the values of mousikê, does our own tendency (part of the legacy of Romanticism) to idealize the kind of sensibility sketched in the previous section not carry with it the risk of exaggerating the extent and depth of adherence to such values within Greek culture as a whole? Might there well have been Greeks who could happily live ‘without the Muses’, without ever ‘having any contact with mousikê’, as the Socrates of Plato’s Republic puts it?

It is clearly not feasible here to address these questions systematically. Available evidence does not, in any case, allow anything like robustly sociological modeling of the relative proportions of particular Greek communities, not even in classical Athens, who were fully committed to an aesthetic of mousikê or, on the other hand, manifested insouciance about amousia. We can turn, though, to one particular source, Old Comedy, for some clues and pointers which, with suitably careful handling, may help to illuminate the issues at stake. Comedy is all the more useful in this respect because of its contiguous but ambivalent theatrical relationship to tragedy. My argument in this section, focused on a small selection of pertinent passages, will aim to show that where the aesthetics of mousikê and the challenge of amousia are concerned, comedy runs not in simple opposition to tragedy but in complex counterpoint with it.

It so happens that the only surviving fifth-century occurrence of the amousos wordgroup not already noted is found in Aristophanes. It turns up in the scene early in Thesmophoriazusae where the young, supposedly effeminate tragedian Agathon is mocked by the old, uncouth Kinsman of Euripides. The whole context hinges on a comically intricate contrast which is both discursive and personal: a contrast in both speech styles and physical demeanor. The resulting collision is one to which connotations of amousia mentioned in the previous section are doubly germane: both in relation

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34 For the current tendency to scale down the size of fifth-century audiences to perhaps 7000 or fewer, on the basis of a new archaeological reconstruction of the Theater of Dionysus, see Revermann 2006, 168–169, Csapo 2007, 97–100 (with the archaeological appendix by H. Goette, ibid. 116–121); Sommerstein 2010, 140.

35 This is precisely the (jaundiced) point of [Xen.] Ath. pol. 1.13: democracy undermined the practices of mousikê as the preserve of an elite but made the rich pay for them in a form which benefited the demos. Cf. Wilson 2000, 13–14, 126–127.

36 See Pl. Resp. 411c, quoted in section 4 below: sociologically, this is not a reference to the ‘uneducated’ tout court but to those obsessed with athletics.
to musico-poetic matters as such, and as a marker of more general socio-cultural values. The term amouson appears at the point at which Agathon, in response to the Kinsman’s barrage of innuendo about his feminine attire (see below), has attempted to explain his costume as part of a ‘mimetic’ act of poetic creativity in which he is assimilating his whole manner to that of female characters. The Kinsman has twice interrupted this explanation with obscene comments (153, 157–158). Seemingly ignoring these, Agathon continues by asserting (Ar. Thesm. 159–160):

Besides, it's such an uncultured sight to see a poet
Who belongs in the fields and is shaggy all over.

ἄλλως τ᾽ ἀμουσόν ἔστι ποιητὴν ἰδεῖν
ἀγρείον δντα και δασύν.37

He then proceeds to invoke the counter-examples of figures such as Ibycus, Anacreon, Alcaeus and the early tragedian Phrynichus whose beautiful poetry and music were matched, he claims, by their fastidiously stylish dress and good looks.

Agathon’s alignment of personal, even sartorial, deportment with the values of mousikê is a comically pointed version of a gesture of social and cultural exclusivity. Even his use of the term amousos itself, together with ἄγρεῖός (instead of ἄγροικος) for ‘rustic’, may have a precious, ‘poeticizing’ ring to it in this context.38 There is more than one point of connection with passages cited in the previous section; we have already seen amousia equated with ‘rusticity’ and even with sartorial inelegance.39 Aristophanes gives the concepts and values in question a racy immediacy, reinforced by the visual contrast between Agathon and the Kinsman, the latter himself decidedly shaggy and perhaps rustic too.40 The Kinsman is no poet, of course (though

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37 The translation ‘incongruous’ for ἀμουσόν in 159, LSJ s.v. ἀμουσός, is too bland, missing the resonance which the word derives from the scene’s clash of poetic/cultural values. Miller 1946, 176 is unwarranted in seeing here a specific reminiscence of Eur. fr. 663 (cf. text at n. 20 above).
38 See Austin and Olson 2004, 109 for both these linguistic points. We should not, however, jump to the conclusion that amousos was an exclusively poetic term in the fifth century: its standard fourth-century prose usage (meaning technically ‘unmusical’, the opposite of mousikos; e.g. Arist. Gen. corr. 319b25–30, and cf. n. 62 below on Plato) means that the lack of comparable fifth-century evidence may be accidental.
39 See Ar. Nub. 655, cited in section 2 above, for rusticity (ἄγρεῖός there paralleling Thesm. 160; cf. previous note); see n. 19 above for a linkage between amousia and dress.
40 The Kinsman’s hair, both facial and bodily, is highlighted in the shaving scene at 215–246; he was treated by Agathon’s servant as a rustic, ἄγροικωτάς, within the paratragic mêlée at 58.
he would be happy to create obscenities for a satyr play, *Ar. Thesm.* 157–158). But it is as if Agathon is subtextually telling him, ‘We fine poets are not vulgar rufff (like you)’. The tragedian and the old man see things from opposite but complementary angles; each of them perceives a nexus of poetic artistry and social style. Agathon’s notion of *amousia* implicitly appeals to a compound aesthetic of specifically poetic activity and something broad enough to count as a ‘lifestyle’. There is some affinity between the present scene and the debate which took place in Euripides’ *Antiope* between Amphion the poet and Zethus the worldly pragmatist. We know that Zethus sneered at his brother’s allegedly effeminate appearance, which he took to be a sign of the decadence of his devotion to a life of song.41 We also know, as it happens, that in an ironic appropriation of his brother’s language of values Zethus urged Amphion to ‘practise the fine music of **physical work**’ (πόνων εὐμοιο-
σίαν/ἀσκεί, Eur. fr. 188)42 and to make such things into his (sc. alternative to) ‘song’ (τοιαύτη̂ς ἡμείς, ibid.). Zethus, we might say, reverses the evaluative force of *amousia*. Not only can he live happily without the Muses. He thinks others should do so too.

But is the Kinsman of *Thesmophoriazusae* just a comically reductive equivalent to the principles of Zethus? The clash between him and Agathon, I suggest, involves something more complicated than that—more complicated, not least, for the aesthetic experience of Aristophanes’ own audience. In the course of the first scene, the play sets up a series of polarized contrasts between, on one side, the intellectual-cum-poetic pretensions of Euripides, Agathon’s slave, and Agathon himself, and, on the other, the Kinsman’s traits of obtuseness, cynicism, and vulgarity. There is an important sense in which the comedy internalizes these polarities in order to make them an effective part of its own theatrical and poetic dynamics: it offers no one-sided resolution to the conflicts of styles and values between the characters. An audience of the play needs to have a degree of understanding for both sides of the divide—a feel for what makes the poets’ pretensions and the Kinsman’s crudity the sorts of stances they are—if it is to appreciate the various twists and layers of humor which give the scene its character. But that in turn opens up the possibility of perceiving in the scene

41 Eur. fr. 185: the style of dress in question may have had Dionysiac connections. Cf. Amphion’s response in fr. 199. Note that part of Amphion’s case rested on a conception of beauty or beautiful things, τὰ καλά, fr. 198.2. Collard et al. 2004, 259–329 provide a useful discussion of the fragments.

42 Note that the adjective cognate with *eumousia* appears in the song of Agathon’s servant at *Ar. Thesm.* 112.
a comic exposure of the difficulty of identifying just where the boundaries of *amousia* are supposed to lie.

There is a further comic element to be factored in here: the incorporation in the Kinsman’s character of something less simple than sheer ignorance of poetry. The clearest instance of this occurs when at 136–145 he displays the poetic knowledge to quote (or adapt) some extracts from Aeschylus’ *Lycourgeia* in the very act of mocking Agathon with a virtuoso sequence of rhetorical questions. That ‘knowledge’, which cannot be fully rationalized but adds a layer of comic uncertainty to the Kinsman’s relationship to poetry, brings with it a drastic shift of speech register from his earlier repertoire of verbal raspberries (βοµβ/uni1F71ξ, Ar. *Thesm*. 45, βοµβαλοβοµβ/uni1F71ξ, 48) and sexual obscenities (Ar. *Thesm*. 50, 57, 62). Moreover, his resort to Aeschylean drama as a weapon of mockery against Agathon might be thought to activate a sense of historical changes in the style and ethos of tragedy: implicitly ‘masculine’ Aeschylus is pitted against the soft ‘effeminacy’ of modern Agathon—a clash of poetic qualities partly akin to the antinomies used to structure the contest of tragedians in *Frogs* and prefigured as early as *Clouds* in the dispute about poetry between father and son reported at 1364–1378. The Kinsman does not articulate any ‘thesis’ about the poetic differences between Aeschylus and Agathon. But, like Strepsiades (also a rustic, ‘uncultured’ figure) in *Clouds*, his lack of rapport with ‘modern’ poetry is associated with a leaning towards the standards of the past, rather than with an aversion to poetry tout court.

This aspect of the scene not only illustrates the slipperiness of the Kinsman’s cultural profile but draws out a teasing paradox that is built into the aesthetics of Aristophanic comedy itself. Aristophanes’ own audience (or reader) must be able to see at least some of the issues raised by the idea of *amousia* from opposing sides simultaneously. In the case of *Thesmophori-azusae*, this means that they should be capable of a sort of vicarious *amousia* in relishing the Kinsman’s mocking subversion of the elevated values—lyric beauty, self-conscious artistry, imaginative impersonations—affirmed by (some) contemporary tragedy, including its supporting poetics of ‘creativity’. But at the same time they need to be able to regard the character of the Kinsman as in many respects crass and vulgar: the kind of person they would be embarrassed to resemble, one might say (adapting a comment on

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43 Cf. Strepsiades’ reference to the ‘modern’ (or ‘younger generation of’) poets, νεώτεροι, at *Nub.* 1370. Note the description, earlier in the same play, of the performer of ‘contemporary’ music as ‘doing away with the Muses’, τὰς Μούσας ἀφανίζων (*Nub.* 972).
comedy made by the Platonic Socrates), in the real social world outside the theater. My claim is not, of course, meant to rule out many conceivable variations of response on the part of individual spectators. But it is hard if not impossible to see how anyone who was not (at some level) interested in engaging with the kinds of poetic details and nuances exploited by Aristophanes’ text could derive any real satisfaction from the scene. One might encapsulate the resulting paradox by saying that the Kinsman’s (comically complicated) amousia is a means to the end of comedy’s recuperation, on its own behalf, of the pleasures and values of mousikê.

It may be instructive to glance here at another Aristophanic passage which exposes the parameters of amousia to the pressures of comic manipulation. The encounter between Dionysus and Heracles in the opening scene of Frogs involves, among other things, a clash of values between a self-professed lover of tragic poetry (including, it is worth recalling, that of Agathon as well as Euripides: see lines 83–84) and someone who appears skeptical, even dismissive, of the value of such poetry altogether. Dionysus’ decision to journey to Hades in search of a dead poet is itself a (comic) enactment of attachment to mousikê as a life-value. It is motivated by a conviction, comparable to the one voiced by the chorus of Euripides’ Heracles (section 2 above), that life needs the experiences afforded by poetry and music: Dionysus has lost something for which he feels a yearning that combines quasi-erotic feelings with a sense of bereavement. The god’s feelings treat the death of Euripides as a diminution of the ‘quality of life’ for lovers of poetic drama. And his quotation of a line from Euripides’ own Oineus (‘some are no longer alive, and those that survive are worthless’, Ar. Ran. 72: οἶ μὲν γὰρ οὐκέτ’ εἰσίν, οἷ δ’ ὄντες κακοtracer, Eur. fr. 565) enlarges his point of view into a judgment on a whole cultural state of affairs.

Heracles, by sharp contrast, has the air of a kind of (comic) ‘philistine’, and thus one type of amousos, where poetry is concerned. Aristophanes is here creating his own version of a figure who, in his general mythological persona, stood in an unstable relationship to mousikê: a good enough musician, in some depictions, to play for the gods, but in others so bad a music pupil that he ends up killing his teacher, Linus. In Frogs, Heracles can

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45 For a reading of Frogs which makes Dionysus’ ‘love’ of poetry a crucial part of the whole play’s thematic trajectory, see Halliwell 2011a, ch. 3.
rattle off the names of ‘lesser’ tragedians (Ar. Ran. 73–87), just as the Kins-
man was able to do in Thesmophoriazusae (Ar. Thesm. 168–170). But in addi-
tion to his sweeping contempt for Euripides (whose poetry he calls a ‘con-
trick’, κ/ωβαλα, and ‘total rubbish’, παµπ/ουρα) he conveys a cool detachment
about whether any tragic drama matters in the way Dionysus believes that
it does. Even his suggestion that Sophocles would be a preferable choice
to Euripides is tempered by the statement, ‘if you really must bring back
[sc. a poet] from there’ (ε/περ/εκ/ειδεν δει σ’ άγειν, Ar. Ran. 77). It is open to
an audience of Frogs to perceive Heracles as emerging from the encounter with
Dionysus as someone appreciative exclusively of the pleasures of the
stomach. That is Dionysus’ own take on their disagreement: ‘Don’t try to
inhabit my mind’, he tells his half-brother, ‘just stick to your own’ (Ar. Ran.
105), before adding, ‘I’ll take your advice where food is concerned’ (Ar. Ran.
107).

There are, for sure, other ways of weighing up the conflicting attitudes
to poetry displayed by Heracles and Dionysus. One might perhaps, for
instance, see Heracles as less of a philistine than I take him to be, and Diony-
sus as correspondingly more eccentric (or undiscerning) in the strength of
his passion for Euripides. But however one positions the two characters on
the spectrum that runs from the sensitivity of the mousikos to the uncouth
(and/or insouciant) insensitivity of the amousos, it is clear that Aristophanes
turns the scene into a vignette of the possibility of radical disagreement over
the importance of poetic-cum-aesthetic value to life. As in the first scene of
Thesmophoriazusae, this places the audience of Frogs itself in an ambiguous
position where they need to be able to savor the clash of values as a form of
experience made available by the distinctive poetic dynamics of comedy. As
I have already suggested, Aristophanic comedy offers no one-sided cynicism
in such matters. If it did, plays like Thesmophoriazusae and Frogs, with their
sustained and intricately allusive fabric of quotation, adaptation, and par-
ody, would be unintelligible: what kind of audience could sit through them
without being able to draw on at least an instinctive appreciation of the
kinds of stylistic and thematic details on which they depend, and without
an underlying awareness of the cultural values which such appreciation pre-
supposed? No engaged audience of such comedies, in other words, could

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47 Dionysus had taken this line from the start of their conversation, using a basic culinary
example (soup) to give Heracles some idea of the intensity of his own desires (62–64).
48 Cf. Dionysus’ own aspiration to judge tragedy ‘with great finesse’ or ‘in the most
cultured manner’, μουσικώτατα (873): the qualities of poetry, qua mousikê (cf. Ran. 797, with
be unconcerned about a slur of amousia, whether or not amousos is the right description for Euripides’ Kinsman in Thesmophoriazusae or Heracles in Frogs.

It is unnecessary to buttress this argument by dwelling on the familiar fact that Aristophanic comedy frequently advertises the importance of a conception of mousikê for its generic self-image and in the process appeals to standards of sophistication and finesse on the part of both the poet and his (ideal) audience. But it is worth adding that Aristophanes can also rely on his audience’s acceptance of the disreputability of amousia in framing satirical gibes against named individuals. One passage which falls into that category is the disdain expressed in the final ode of Frogs for Euripides’ supposed abandonment of traditional norms of mousikê under the influence of Socratic intellectualism. Rather than reconsidering here that famous and controversial passage, I shall end this section with a rather different example, the mocking vignette of Cleon’s allegedly defective musical education which is found in one of the choral odes of Knights (984–991):

There’s another thing that amazes me:
his swinish lack of culture!
They say, you know,
the boys who went to school with him,
that the Dorian mode was the only one
in which he used to tune his lyre—
he refused to learn anything else!

my next note), call for a matching sensitivity of appreciation (however unevenly Dionysus may actually live up to this aspiration).

For appeals to a Muse or Muses as a badge of self-conscious comic mousikê, see esp. Eq. 505–506, Vesp. 1028, Pax 775, 816, Ran. 356, 674, 876, frs. 347–348 KA. Sommerstein 2009, 116–135 is a useful survey of the vocabulary/ways in which Old Comedians, esp. Aristophanes, construct a poetics of their genre.

Ran. 1491–1499: discussions include Arrighetti 2006, 168–180 and Brancacci 2008, 35–55 (too anxious to see Plato and Xenophon as responding directly to this Aristophanic passage); cf. Halliwell 2011a, 151–152. The passage should not be read as critiquing a general ‘sophistic’ threat to traditional mousikê, contra Koller 1963, 88 (cf. n. 61 below).
A striking implication of this passage for my purposes is that musical values are culturally contestable. Cleon is portrayed as amousos (worse still, as badly educated as a pig, huomousia being a phonologically piquant variation on amousia) in virtue not of incompetence but of deliberate resistance to anything more than a basic, conservative musical taste. His restriction to the Dorian mode (which happens also to prepare the way for a pun on financial corruption in the Greek) probably implies a determination to retain a deliberately severe, manly public ethos, averse to refinements of mousikê. It also carries echoes of the reputation of Themistocles, to whom Cleon compares himself at Knights 812 (cf. 884). We know from a fragment of Ion of Chios that Themistocles was believed to have had little or no musical education/ability; it seems also that he tried to make a virtue of this, contrasting the point with his great political achievements. We can detect here the kind of polarization to which debates about the life-value of, in the widest sense, mousikê were susceptible. Themistocles and Cleon represent in the political sphere the kind of stance adopted by the mythological Zethus in Euripides’ Antiope (section 2 above). Cleon may also have been self-consciously opposed in this respect to Pericles, who is presented by Thucydides as idealizing, and aligning himself with, Athenian ‘love of beauty’ as a key value of the city’s culture.

51 On the metaphorical lexicon of swinishness for cultural and intellectual shortcomings, see e.g. Ar. Pax 928, Pl. Tht. 166c, with Taillardat 1965, 254–255. Beta 2004, 88 compares ‘stupid, pig-stylish talk’ (λόγος ... ἁμαθίας ...) συναρτήματος) in Cratinus fr. 345 KA. It is germane that at Ar. Vesp. 35–36 Cleon’s demagogic style involves ‘the voice of a burnt sow’: on the sense of this see Zuntz 1989; cf. Beta 2004, 33.

52 The Dorian ‘mode’ (or tuning/scale) counts as the most important from a culturally conservative viewpoint at Pl. Resp. 399a, Lach. 188d. On the musical modes in the classical period, cf. West 1992, 177–184.

53 Neil 1901, 138 compares Cleon’s ‘contempt of culture’ at Thuc. 3.37–38 (the Mytilenean debate). In similar vein, Gomme 1956, 300 notes a connection between Cleon’s brazen exculpation of ‘ignorance’, amathia (cf. n. 51 above), at Thuc. 3.37.3–4 and the depiction of Cleon in Knights as lacking in mousikê. Cf. n. 56 below. Note the conjunction of amathia with amousia at Pl. Resp. 41e, quoted in section 4 below; cf. n. 16 above.


55 Thuc. 2.40.1. While Rusten 1983, 17 is right to say that this and nearby claims need not apply to every individual Athenian, he is wrong, in my view, to argue that Pericles is characterizing separate kinds of ‘lives’: rather, he is simply generalizing about Athenian values.
Whether or not the chorus in *Knights* is picking up some of Cleon’s own rhetorical slogans, Aristophanes certainly feels able to count on his audience’s appreciation and enjoyment of a charge of *amousia* carried to an extreme of ‘swinishness’: this, after all, is a premise of the entire play, as the Sausage-Seller was reassured at the outset.\(^56\) However much Aristophanes may elsewhere exploit the ambiguities arising from ideas of *amousia*, and however much the real Cleon may himself have manipulated such issues for his own populist politics, the satirical priorities of *Knights* unmistakably show that Aristophanic comedy retains the right to tarnish others with accusations of *amousia*. While comedy can appeal, in some circumstances, to the social elitism which had traditionally belonged with an extensive education in *mousikê*,\(^57\) its own theatrical raison d’être is tied to performance (with choruses of non-aristocratic citizens) at civic festivals whose audiences, whatever their exact size and composition, are typically treated as representative of the collective democratic citizenry.\(^58\) Aristophanic comedy always positions itself deftly, in the end, on the side of the Muses. Or, rather, it presents those Muses in its own gaudy clothing and proclaims its allegiance to their aesthetic and cultural values as remade in its own image.

4. Plato and the Philosophical Revaluation of *mousikê*

In a famous passage of Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates tells Cebes that on many occasions during his life he has had dreams in which various apparitions addressed him with the words, ‘Socrates, compose and practice music’ (µουσικὴν ποιεὶ καὶ ἐργάζομαι, Pl. *Phd.* 6od–61b). In his attempts to interpret the meaning of this injunction, Socrates had long assumed that his dreams were urging him to continue with (and intensify) his existing way of life, ‘on the grounds that philosophy is the greatest music’ (ἀς φιλοσοφίας µέν ὀψης

\(^{56}\) At Ar. *Eq.* 188–193 the Sausage-Seller’s lack of *mousikê* (above the level of basic literacy) is converted into an ideal qualification for a demagogue; cf. Eup. fr. 208 KA (Maricas = Hyperbolus) with Storey 2003, 201–202. Likewise being ‘ignorant’ (*amathês*): see n. 53 above.

\(^{57}\) Ar. *Ran.* 727–733 is the most direct instance of this, but even this passage, with its special political nostalgia in the circumstances of 405, suggests that an education in the values of *mousikê* was widely shared in Athens: cf. Swift 2010, 43–55 on evidence (including comedy) for ‘continuity of cultural values across the socio-economic spectrum’ (51).

μεγίστης μουσικῆς, Pl. Phd. 61a). But once he found himself awaiting execution in prison, he began to wonder whether the dream injunction might after all be using the term *mousikê* in its ‘popular’ sense. As a precaution, he accordingly composed a hymn to Apollo and versified some fables of Aesop.

The significance of Socrates’ strange dreams remains unresolved for readers of the *Phaedo* as well as for Socrates himself. But it is notable that on both the philosophical and the poetic interpretations which he adopts at different times, Socrates understands his dreams to be instructing him to give *mousikê* an essential place in his life, even as he approaches the moment of his death. The dream injunction does not disclose what the value of *mousikê* is supposed to be, but the earnestness with which Socrates responds to it presupposes that *mousikê* can somehow be made a life-defining activity. In a very different Platonic context, an idea of this kind is also found in the mouth of Protagoras, who espouses a theory of education (including the teaching of poetry and music to children) built on the principle that ‘the whole of human life needs good rhythm and harmony’ (πᾶς γὰρ ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εὐρυθμίας τε καὶ εὐαρμοστίας δεῖται, Pl. Prt. 326b).

However authentic or otherwise Plato’s presentation of Protagoras may be, the views advocated by the latter must make sense as a culturally plausible ideal, an ideal akin to the one Protarchus affirms in the *Philebus* (section 1 above) and which links the value of *mousikê* to the larger goals of life. This is certainly a Protagoras one can imagine concurring with the chorus’s sentiment in Euripides’ *Heracles*, ‘may I never live without the Muses!’ We might equivalently posit for Plato’s (unlike Aristophanes’) Socrates the view that ‘a life without *mousikê* is not worth living’. But in his case, there seems more uncertainty about just what kind of *mousikê* it is which human life requires.

In the previous sections of this chapter I used selective evidence from Euripidean and Aristophanic theater to explore some of the ways in which problems of *amousia* form points of interference within the workings of Athenian/Greek cultural values and thereby draw attention to part of what

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59 Although this may be a Pythagorean idea, the reason for supposing it to be such in Burnet 1911, 17 does not meet the point: Aristoxenus fr. 26 Wehrli, reporting Pythagorean use of music for ‘καθαρσίς of the soul’, refers to actual music (cf. Burkert 1972, 212). For the philosopher as true *mousikos*, cf. e.g. Resp. 591d, Phdr. 248d, Ti. 88c.


61 Koller 1963, 87 cites Pl. Prt. 326b as testimony to traditional ‘musical’ education, but on 88–90 he suggests, without convincing evidence, that such education was undermined by the sophistic movement. Cf. n. 50 above.
is entailed by those values. As that evidence helped to show, the values of *mousikê*, together with perceptions of the threat of *amousia*, attach themselves to core activities of song/poetry, music, and dance but also tend to configure themselves in terms of a number of social, educational, and ethical variables. They are, that is to say, a matter of aesthetics (in which ideas of beauty, form, expressiveness, and more besides, play a part) embedded in a larger matrix of cultural practices and standards. In this final section I turn my attention to Plato, whose dialogues, I shall suggest, do not represent a clean break with older ideas of *mousikê* and *amousia* but instead reappraise and partly redefine them for the purposes of a new philosophical ideal. That process of redefinition, together with some of its ambiguities (for which Socrates’ shifting interpretations of his dream injunction in *Phaedo* are an apt symbol), is itself testimony to the importance of issues whose long pre-platonic ancestry has been sampled in the earlier stages of my argument.

As it happens, the vocabulary of *amousia* occurs more often in Plato than in any other author from the classical period. His dialogues confirm that by the fourth century the semantics of the *amousos* wordgroup had settled into a pattern of usage (whose fifth-century predecessors have already been noted) which embraced both a specifically musical sense and a looser denotation, each of them the opposite of a corresponding use of *mousikos* and its cognates. The first of these senses of *amousia* picks out a lack of more or less technical proficiency and/or appreciation: so, an inability (or disinclination) to sing, play an instrument, or follow a musical performance. The other denotes a lack of refinement across a broader spectrum of educational, social and cultural behavior, its precise inflection depending on the presuppositions of particular contexts. It is the ramifications of this second sense within Plato’s own thought, and its association with a philosophically redefined ideal of *mousikê*, which concern me here. For reasons of space, I shall restrict myself mostly to some observations on the *Republic*.

When Socrates impersonates the Muses in *Republic* 8, making them predict the inevitable decline of even as scrupulously designed a constitution as that of Callipolis, he gives them a vision of a future in which a debased generation of the Guardian class will become neglectful of the Muses themselves: ‘in their role as Guardians, they will start to neglect *first, regarding the

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domain of music as less important than they should, and after that they will neglect the domain of gymnastics; the result will be that your young people will become less cultured (amousoteroi).

This should remind us (if some readers need reminding) that the entire structure of the Republic’s thought-experiment of an ideal city would collapse without its foundation on the practice of a form of mousikê. If the (undebased) Guardian class is imagined as attaining ultimately to a philosophically higher level of mousikê (see below), they nonetheless do so on the basis of a system which preserves the elaborately musico-poetic (as well as the gymnastic) elements of traditional Greek education.

The argument pursued by Socrates in the Republic involves a reappraisal, and at certain points a challenging critique, of the idea of mousikê as a cultural repository of life-values. But this reappraisal does not simply overturn existing views of ‘the realm of the Muses’ or the price to be paid for neglecting that realm (amousia). It preserves from such views a notion of mousikê as something which does not belong in a category of its own but can shape the qualities of life as a whole. In Republic 3, when setting out the principles of a (partially reformed) education in poetry and music, Socrates thinks of the properties of music per se as expressively connected to qualities of ‘life’: in a manner which probably reflects the ideas of Damon, he suggests to Glaucon that they need to find rhythms and melodic tunings (harmoniai) which can match and convey in sound the ethical qualities of certain kinds of life, bios (Pl. Resp. 399e–401a). Soon after this, at 401, Socrates extends the link between musical/artistic form and life-defining character into a principle which he projects onto the entire cultural environment.

In this remarkable passage, he declares that not only the arts he has already discussed (poetry, song and music, and we can add dance too) but also painting,

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63 ἡμῶν πρώτον ἀρέστημι ἀμελείν φύλακες δντες, παρ’ ἐλαττών τοῦ δεόντος ἡγησάμενοι τά μουσικής, δεύτερον δέ τά γυμναστικής, δεύτερον δέ τά γυμναστικής, διενέχεσται ὑμῖν οἱ νέοι: Resp. 546d. It would be at least legitimate to take φύλακες δντες as concessive, ‘although (sc. supposedly) Guardians …’.

64 Contra Barker 2007, 47 and n. 18, who queries whether Damon had much influence on Plato at all.


66 Although dance receives no explicit discussion, Resp. 412b makes it clear that it is subject to the same principles as poetry and music; cf. 373b for the inclusion of dancers in the class of practitioners of mousikê (οι περὶ μουσικῆ), and 383c for a passing reference to the choral component of drama in the city’s culture.
weaving, architecture, and related activities, as well as the human body
and the structures of other natural objects, all exhibit a principle of good
and bad form: ‘in all these things there is the intrinsic possibility of beauty
or ugliness of form’ (ἐν πάσι γὰρ τούτοις ἐνεστὶν εὐσχημοσύνη ἡ ἄσχημοσύνη, 
Pl. Resp. 401a). This is a principle, he indicates, of mimetically expressive
form (whether rhythmic, melodic, verbal, or visual): form which embodies,
represents, and communicates qualities of ethical ‘life’, and whose beauty
(or ugliness) will be absorbed into the souls of those who come into contact
with it.67 The passage promotes an ideal, therefore, which is self-evidently
educational, social, and political. But its sensitivity to expressiveness and
beauty of form makes its concerns also, in quintessentially Greek terms, a
matter of irreducibly aesthetic value—a kind of experience which operates
through the capacities for evaluative judgment that inhere in perception, 
aisthēsia.68

Socrates’ notion of euskhêmosunê (beauty of form) covers mousikê in
both the narrower and wider senses mentioned above. As we have seen, it
is a notion which grows out of a discussion of the rhythmic and melodic
possibilities of music (in its role as an accompaniment to poetry) but also
serves, in its strongly ethical and ‘life-expressive’ slant, to transform the
concept of mousikê into something far more than a sphere of technical
competency. Following on from the passage just cited, Socrates describes
the ideal mousikos as someone who will be capable of recognizing the
‘patterns’ or ‘forms’ (eidê) of ethical qualities (self-discipline, courage, etc.)
both in their actual instances and in ‘images’ (eikones) of them (Pl. Resp.
402b–c). Such a person will be aroused to a powerful passion (erôs) for the
most beautiful sights, above all for the person in whom there is discernible
concord between body and soul; beauty of this kind is apprehended through
the senses but has a value that is more than material (Pl. Resp. 402d). The
impetus of his argument enables Socrates to reach the point where
he can describe sexual desire that seeks fulfillment in merely carnal acts
as itself a type of amousia and of insensitivity to beauty, apeirokalia (Pl.
Resp. 403c). Immediately after this, he encapsulates his ideal in the grand

67 For perceptive remarks on this passage, including the mimetic aspect of the theory,
see Schofield 2011, 236–238; his article is the best analysis of the psychology of music in the
68 Although the terminology of aisthēsis is no necessary part of my argument, I note that
Socrates’ ideals in this section of Republic 3 do in fact identify sense-perception (αἰσθανό-
θαι, αἰσθησις) as the channel of the evaluative experiences in question: see 401e3, 402c5, 
411d5.
pronouncement that ‘the practice of music should culminate in the erotics of beauty’ (δεί δέ που τελευτάν τά μουσικά εἰς τά τοῦ καλοῦ ἔρωτικά, Pl. Resp. 403c).

Correspondingly, Socrates develops the category of amousia into one which marks a deficiency of sensibility in regard to much more than music in the tonal sense. He does so in a way which once again illustrates how life-informing, life-defining values are at stake in matters of mousikê. Later in Republic 3, Socrates applies the term ‘uncultured’ (amousos) to the person who leads a life dominated by the body and who ‘never has any contact with [or ‘never touches’] music or philosophy’ (μουσικής δὲ καὶ φιλοσοφίας μὴ ἀπτηται), who ‘never keeps the company of a Muse’ (μὴ δὲ κοινωνὴ Μούσης μηδαμὴ), and who lacks any concern for ‘either reason or the rest of mousikê’ (οὕτε λόγον ... οὕτε τῆς ἀλλής μουσικῆς). Such a person becomes ‘a beast living in ignorance and insensitivity, with a lack of rhythm and grace’ (ὡσπερ θηρίον ... ἐν ἀμάδια καὶ σκιαίστητι μετὰ ἀρφυμίας τε καὶ ἀχαριστίας ζη), Pl. Resp. 411c–e.). The scope of both mousikê and amousia in this part of Republic 3 expands from literal reference to music into a philosophically ‘thickened’ conception of the workings of mind or soul as a whole, so much so that Socrates seems to come close, as at Phaedo 61a (above), to fusing into one the ideas of mousikê and philosophy. Yet that process of conceptual expansion does not lose its connection to the tonal, formal, and expressive properties of music as such (alongside poetry, dance, and more besides). On the contrary, the need for the right kind of music and for its carefully balanced incorporation into the structure of a life is reiterated by Socrates at 411a–b immediately before the characterization of the amousos paraphrased above. If Plato’s dialogue, then, in a sense appropriates the value-terms of mousikê for its own purposes, it is just as true that the ideal of the philosophical soul advanced by Socrates retains an authentically musical dimension. We are dealing here with—among other things—a philosophical aesthetics.

Two further points about this stretch of the Republic are worth emphasizing. One is that while the line of thought represents a characteristically Platonic model of the soul’s orientation towards ethically grounded beauty, it lacks anything like the metaphysical idealism found in the visionary sections of the later books of the Republic, Socrates’ second speech on love in the Phaedrus, or Diotima’s speech in the Symposium. All those other passages make aesthetics dependent on metaphysical hypotheses; Republic 3

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69 Cf. also Pl. Resp. 486d, where the nature of an un-philosophical soul is called ‘uncultured and badly formed’, τῆς ἀμόουσου τε καὶ ἀσχήμονος φύσεως: both adjectives hark back to Republic 3.
does not, and to that extent its principles of form and expression are less far removed from the values of mousikê espoused elsewhere in Greek culture. The second point is that the argument gives a much more explicit, central place to the experience of certain ‘art-forms’ (including music, poetry, painting, architecture, etc.) than any of those other texts do, and arguably more than any other passage in the whole of Plato. Is that—paradoxically—why, even now (with a few exceptions), it remains an often neglected, even a ‘forgotten’, text where many attempts to read an aesthetics in Plato are concerned? Certainly, the relationship of the passage to others in Plato, even within the Republic itself, is problematic. How is it, for instance, that Socrates can so emphatically here count painting as an art ‘full’, as he puts it, of potential for ethically expressive beauty of form (i.e. euskhêmosunê), while in Republic 10 he will reductively use the same art as an example of ‘mere’ mirroring of appearances and superficial pretense? The orthodox answer to this question is simply to privilege one of these texts (Republic 10) as somehow definitive, Plato’s ‘final word’ on the subject, while downgrading or ignoring the implications of the other. But large parts of the Republic, from Republic 2 to 8, are underpinned by a conviction of the importance of (a reformed) mousikê for the life of both body and soul. If Republic 10 seems to suggest something radically different, we should perhaps reconsider our ways of reading it.

5. Conclusion

What, in fact, could be more telling for the purposes of my present argument, and as a conclusion to these compressed observations on Plato, than the way in which Socrates rounds off his critique of mimetic poetry in Republic 10 by both anticipating and defending himself against a potential charge of cultural philistinism? Apologetically appealing to the now famous motif of an ‘ancient quarrel’ between philosophy and poetry, Socrates

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70 See esp. the reference to painting, weaving, architecture and more besides at 401a, cited in my text above.

71 Annas 1981, 95–101 strains to minimize the positive aesthetic principles outlined at Pl. Resp. 401–403. Nehamas 2007, 73, despite his own platonizing strands of thought, ignores this passage when he states, ‘Plato himself did not include art among the proper expressions of culture’; contrast Burnyeat 1999, esp. 217–222.

72 For my own attempt at a new reading, see Halliwell 2011a, 179–207.

73 In Halliwell 2011a, 191–193 I insist, against the grain of prevailing orthodoxy, on the apologetic function of the ‘ancient quarrel’ motif.
avoids the term *amousia* itself but uses others which belong to a cluster of vocabulary we have seen associated with it. He imagines the personified figure of Poetry (and, by implication, some of the ‘lovers of poetry’, *Resp. 607d7*, who read the *Republic*) accusing himself and Glaucon of ‘uncouth-ness and crudity’ (σκληρότητα ... και ἄγροικιν), i.e. uncultured insensitivity, in relation to poetry’s bewitching power.74 Stressing that in fact he and Glaucon know only too well what it is like to be ‘bewitched’ (κηλουμοίνας, Pl. *Resp. 607c7*: an idea as old as Homer), and that they would in principle ‘gladly welcome back’ poetry (άσμενοι ἀν καταδεχομέθα, Pl. *Resp. 607c6*) into their city (and souls) if only the right reasons for doing so could be found, Socrates appears deeply anxious to rebut a charge of philistinism—the kind of charge Aristophanes’ *Frogs* 1491–1499 shows to have been at least an imaginable gibe against the historical Socrates.75 Whatever else it signifies, Socrates’ anxiety at *Republic 607b–c* discloses, I submit, that Plato himself is anxious that readers of the dialogue should not think that *Republic 10’s* critique of poetic mimesis amounts to a philistine repudiation of *mousikê*, as opposed to a probing philosophical scrutiny of the foundations on which its values rest. In the light of the other evidence surveyed in this chapter, we can see this moment in the *Republic* as contributing to a larger debate about aesthetic value: more particularly, about whether the value of all those experiences provided by the art(s) of the Muses is indispensable to the best kind of human life. That debate would, of course, continue in various forms.76 A history of intense commitment to *mousikê* was one of the defining features of Greek culture. It was a history always defined in part by complex interplay with the perceived threat of *amousia*.

Bibliography


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74 For the vocabulary of σκαθώτης and ἄγροικια, including their pairing in Ephippus fr. 23 KA and Ar. *Nub. 655*, see section 2 above.
75 See n. 50 above.
76 For one germane example, see Philodemus’ response to those who accused Epicureans like himself of cultural philistinism (αγrhoικία) because of their reductive view of music (in relation to poetry) at Phld. *Mus. 4*, col. 140.14–27, 144.1–6 Delattre: on the apparent reference to Plato’s ‘lovers of poetry’ (*Resp. 607d7*) at *Mus. col. 140.27*, cf. Delattre 2007, II, 440–441, nn. 2, 5, but his idea that Philodemus is parodying Plato seems misplaced and his claim that Plato ‘condemns’ lovers of poetry is seriously misleading.