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# Mode of Operations: A Critique of the Agonistic View of Greek Musical Modes in Plato and Aristotle

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# MODE OF OPERATIONS

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A Critique of the Agonistic View of Greek Musical Modes in Plato and  
Aristotle



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HONORS BACHELOR OF ARTS THESIS

## Introduction

Music, and all of the genres contained within it, has a tendency to be over-generalized and subject to hackneyed phrases which have become clichéd in writing and academic research. As long as music has been around, different people have felt different things about it. However, the general consensus is that music is a “good thing” to have since humans are capable of producing complex avenues of expression. Visual art, theatre and music have the invaluable dynamic of using “both hemispheres of the brain” in order to bring out the fullest potential of human expression<sup>1</sup>. Not only has this been proven true in various studies of brain function when performing the action accompanied with art’s expression, but there is an undeniable pleasure and universality to the language and influence music has on culture, development and value. This intertwining relationship of music, language, culture, value and education is exactly why I scrutinize and question parts of the ancient methods of Plato and Socrates when it comes to views of the Greek modes’ values in education. While these ancient philosophers do, in my opinion, correctly link the beautiful and the Good to the study of musical modes due to their affects on audience’s emotions, I believe that their political agendas and such censorship diminish the full educative potential that all of the modes offer – not just the few that Plato and Socrates allow in the *polis*.

One late modern German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), comments on the universality and even the necessity of music in general in the following quote: “Without music, life would be a *mistake*<sup>2</sup>”. In both of his texts, *Twilight of the Idols* and *Birth of Tragedy*, music is related to the will, the Oneness and primordial being since music holds the special place

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<sup>1</sup> Bailey 2005:100.

<sup>2</sup> Van Tongeren 2002:11.

of being “pre-linguistic<sup>3</sup>”. Therefore, this view of music as a good in itself harkens back to the view of the ancients, Plato and Aristotle, whose philosophies revolve around the ultimate Good which brings the true meaning of life. This Good, and things related to the Good, such as reason, logic, math, art and music, all have the capacity to harbor value solely by virtue of being what they are – themselves. Nothing needs to be added to them in order to make them valuable, their value and goodness is inherent because of the way they form us as human beings to influence us and our minds as we “become who we are” in our life and humanity<sup>4</sup>. In this way, music can be said to be good in itself as itself, i.e., as it *is*. In the *Republic*, Plato often speaks highly of music in that it is necessary for the philosopher kings to learn in order to have appropriate understanding of harmony in mind, body and the soul. Once this harmony is attained, one can be said to be closer to the “just” and therefore, closer to the Good, as Plato states in the *Republic* in section 371a-d. It must be made clear that music of the ancients is vastly different than that of modernity. While the conception, theory and practice of music was different, the construction and thoughts of harmony remained similar so that ideas heard in Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Poetics* and *Politics* can still have equal resonance in modernity, even with the different conception of music in general.

Nietzsche also polarizes the view of the necessity of music and its ancient inherent qualities with his discussion on the “Homeric Contest”, an essay in his book *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In the “Homeric Contest”, Nietzsche reduces modern conceptions of ancient topics to base reasoning and almost barbaric dysfunctionality. While these views of modernity seem harsh, crass and often controversial, the beautiful part of the writing is that there may be some truth to what Nietzsche is referencing. For instance, in the ‘Homeric Contest’, Nietzsche claims

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<sup>3</sup> Van Tongeren 2002:7.

<sup>4</sup> Spector 2013:371.

that “in order for something to be deemed dignified, it must stand the test of a competition with an opponent and best him<sup>5</sup>”. This competition includes subjects that were seen as inherently good and valuable like, logic, theatre, and music, and the only way to make such things valuable in modernity is through the agonistic work of a competition against a fellow artist. The worth is then placed on the ability to win the contest, not in the thing itself as it is. This value shift is a recorded and unrecorded reflection of time passage, technological expansion and cultural mutation throughout history. This duality between the aestheticism of the ancients and the conditional goodness of the moderns is an essential Nietzschean theme. Therefore, this essay generates grounds for analysis of the intersection of music, philosophy and the Classics. These three areas of study are interesting because all have become “less opportunistic and less practical<sup>6</sup>”. Instead, the value has shifted to the monetary effect and reward of pursuing a discipline. The practical worth of any study only becomes dignified by the ability to produce an end such as monetary gain. This value shift is diametrically opposed to the ancient view of the arts where they are good not as a means to an end with some sort of gain, but they are good in themselves.

In order to proceed, it must be made clear what is meant by the term “aesthetic” or “aestheticism”. The term as it relates to an artistic movement did not arise until ca. 1850 in British literature movements that featured important authors like Oscar Wilde. Linguistically, “aesthetic” is Greek in its root<sup>7</sup>. “Aesthetic” comes from the adjective *αἰσθητικός* which translates to “one who perceives” or “one who sees”. This adjective has its base from the verb

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<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, Translated by Diethe 1997:179.

<sup>6</sup> Solomon 2010:524.

<sup>7</sup> Lippman 1963:193 Oscar Wilde was an Irish author and playwright who supported the movement of the Aesthetic Movement which hit Western Europe in the 1850’s and 1860’s. Wilde is notably credited for coining the Latin phrase *ars gratia artis* as the unsung slogan for the movement as a whole. The phrase in its literal translation is “art for the sake of art”, a model which falls directly in line with the meaning of the art as viewed without the lens of practicality, but through its goodness as it is.

*αἰσθάνομαι*, a deponent verb which is translated as “to see”, “to perceive”, or, due to the reflexive properties of a middle feeling with the deponent verb, it can mean to “to feel<sup>8</sup>”. This sense of seeing, perceiving and feeling relates to the senses, however, the idea of aestheticism as an intellectual idea runs much deeper. Aestheticism not only requires the ability to see and feel what is directly near the bodily senses, but the ability to remove the beauty from the perspective of the perception of the art’s creator. This view of “sight” is a metaphysical look into the reason, value and quality of art as it applies to the art in its own way – a mode of expression.

Aestheticism must not therefore be tainted by the external force of practicality which drives the subject to become a teleological means to produce an end for a gain. Aestheticism takes the purity of the expression and presents an inclusive congregation for the avenues of expression which the arts can take. In this sense, an aesthetic view brings in the potential value from all angles of “sight” that surround the mode of expression. However, it hinges upon a disconnect of surface beauty from the essential goodness that the ancients, namely Plato and Socrates, make prominent in their accounts for permission for certain arts into the *polis* education. Here lies the value and goodness of perception, perspective, purity and passion of the artist. The drive of modernity, according to Nietzsche’s “Homeric Contest”, is to expose the weakness of another’s art by means of a competition in order to the value of the “better” art. The flaw as seen by the aesthetic argument is contingent upon the basis of having art be subjugated to such telos and being reduced to produce an end. The expression is what the art is and the means and the end are one in the same if viewed purely as “art for its own sake<sup>9</sup>”. Yet, it is true that art, whether visual, sensual or aural, will end up producing some sort of reaction in a causal relationship. In a sense, the act of artistic production is the means to the end of the reaction of the audience. However,

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<sup>8</sup> Translations by Robert Crawford.

<sup>9</sup> Lippman 1963:199.

this is debasing the value of art itself by attempting to separate art from expression. Art has a concrete, written or acted version, but that is the nature of expression for humans. The essence of the art remains the same whether it is or is not communicated through a physical state. Such a physical manifestation allows for others to more easily perceive the expression demonstrated by the existence of the art itself. While Plato and Aristotle have a censored and reactionary view of the modes, the view of aestheticism would present the modes as what they are on the surface, musical expression. However, the aesthetic view lacks the central connection between beauty and the good, which makes the affect of each specific mode so important to the ancients that they sought to censor some of them in their education.

There are some forums which have a unique ability to create the guise of aestheticism while only perpetuating the “Homeric Contest” of the conditionality of the worth and dignity of art. The forum I will focus on is the musical competition. The spirit of choral musicianship is kept alive throughout the present day through multifarious competitions with different genres and styles. The bottom line is that the person or group who demonstrates the best ability in displaying the expression of musicianship advances until there is an ultimate winner, a person or group, with the most points on a grading scale at the end of the competition. I have even participated in such competitions as I aspired to be a musician who showcases the best qualities of what the ideal musician should be. In order to complete this task, one would need to know the music extensively and demonstrate such expression as genuinely as possible in order to win the prize. Even the ancients had musical lyric competition like the Lyric Competitions of Bacchus where singers and musicians would compete in games of a similar nature to gain recognition.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Henderson 1989:30.

This idea of a musical competition presents a problem though. While the overarching idea is to be focused on the music to better the self and one's musicianship, the thematic center revolves around the mode of competition and music as a means to an end for the prize of recognition or monetary gain as seen in all the televised singing competitions throughout the years. For instance, there was a study conducted by Peter Dykema concerning the amount of musical knowledge students had acquired from both listening to music because they liked it and students who were drilled in musical areas for means of a competition. While the results were not overwhelmingly one-sided, the study proved that the students who were drilled music for competitive atmospheres actually knew less about the music than students who listened to similar style music because they liked the music for its own expression to them<sup>11</sup>. In this study, the students who were learning the music for a competition represented the moderns in terms of using art for practicality and betterment of the self in order to be seen as dignified and worthy at the victory over another. On the other hand, the students who listened to the similar music because they liked it represented the views of the aesthetics since they could see the music as the expression of art that resonated with them without the taint of practicality to cloud the visage of artistic simplicity.

Plato and Aristotle expound upon these aesthetic views which oppose the Nietzschean sense of agonistic qualities present in modern music as seen in competitions. In the *Republic*, Plato discusses the use of the music as valuable in itself in order to become closer to the Good. His view of social justice depends on the sense of order inherent in both reason and in music, i.e., the sense of *harmoniae* which allow the philosopher kings to understand how to live harmony with the world around them. Aristotle discusses the aestheticism of music and the Greek musical

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<sup>11</sup> Dykema 1923:60.



structure, called the Greek Mode, comparable to the modern-day version of a scale in a way (further explicated in Chapter 1) in his work, *Poetics*. While these texts endorse the importance and inherent value of music as a philosophical avenue for understanding the world, the culture and the self, there is also a turning point. Later in Plato's *Republic* and in Aristotle's *Politics*, there is another side of music which progressively looks forward into the modern view of practicality and conditional good qualities of music as either good or bad. These works deal with the affects of modes as attributes which inhibit their ability to be purely perceived as good in themselves. This is to say that, since some modes are more "pure" in tone quality, the way they make you feel because of their sound is considered more appropriate for the mind. However, due to the culture, since the modes were based on the music of geographic regions of Greece and the surrounding areas, some modal music operated in a different fashion which made the audiences feel different, or even inclined their audiences to drunkenness or other vices<sup>12</sup>. Plato and Aristotle impose these affects upon the modes to indicate whether or not they should or should not be regarded as music appropriate to listen to. This categorization implies the value of the modes as contingent upon them producing certain affects in their audiences. Modes then become conditionally good and conditionally bad for Plato and Aristotle who earlier advocated for the aesthetic view of the modes as music which is good in and of itself. This turning point becomes critical in the development, or, rather, devaluation, that occurs in music as seen in Nietzsche's "Homeric Contest". This essay will analyze the modes as music and from the Greek modal music structures, examine the affects and conditions which Plato and Aristotle place upon certain modes which, in the end, devalue an area of art which was once stated by the same philosophers to be good in and of itself. The effects of this hypocritical shift are still felt today when the musical competitions put the prize before the aestheticism of the music itself. Modal structures

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<sup>12</sup> Denniston 1913:90.

are even rarely seen in western music with the exception of jazz, but, to the untrained ear, such an old-fashioned art form gets generalized and lumped in with other things instead being explicated to show the true value and worth. With an analysis of Plato and Aristotle and the views of the Greek Modes, it becomes clearer to understand the modern shift toward the conditional, practical and competitively agonistic view of the operation of music such as the modes instead of musical expression being good in itself. The agonistic struggle for the conditional goodness as seen in the views which assess the musical value of the modes, the ancient and the aesthetic, focus on the crux of this essay. For although the ancients do not view the modes in a holistic light, as shown by their censorship due to political agendas, the emotional and expressive resonance in the affects of the modes is much more heightened than that of the view of Aestheticism.

On the other hand, Aestheticism would not censor the modes based solely on the affect each one produces, but the sheer intellectual value of the mode as perceived. This view is problematic due to the downplay of the interaction between the music of the mode and the importance of feeling and imitation of such feelings. For the knowledge of how to handle these feelings and affects of the modes yield knowledge of music and the human character which would enable a more well-rounded Philosopher King for Plato. While there is much ground to cover in terms of philosophy and Greek culture, I shall begin the next portion by setting the groundwork for the modes as music and knowledge of the structures so as to meld philosophical, musical and Classical Greek thought into a coherent stream of argument.

Chapter 1: The Modes as Music Then and Today



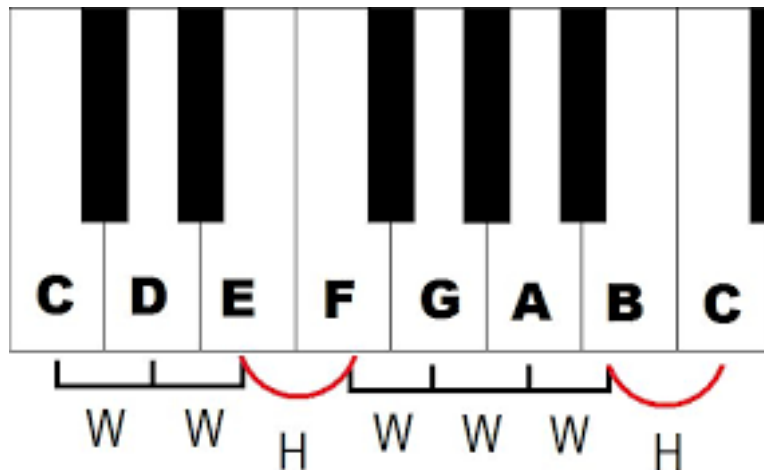
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The Epitaph of Seikilos (above) is the oldest surviving musical composition anywhere around the globe. It is written in the original Greek notation and is dated anywhere from 200 B.C. to 100 A.D.

Our conception of music today differs radically from the ancient Greeks' perception of music in terms of scale, pitch notation and the modern conception of a key signature. While some concepts remain the similar including the idea of a starting pitch and a concluding "final pitch", the way in which the ancient Greeks shaped their musical knowledge differs greatly from the construction of modern music. A song, as generally composed, performed and heard today in genres such as pop music and most classical music, is centered around a specific pattern of notes in a scale that is framed by a key signature. The name of a particular key is based on the first note in the scale. For instance, a piece that is in C Major while contain the notes of the scale

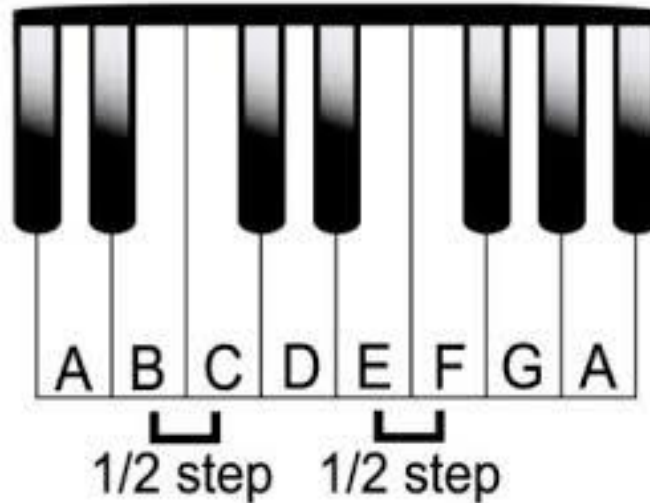
pattern that starts on the note C. With a certain pattern of sharps, which raise a note up one semitone or half step, i.e., the very next adjacent note on the piano, and flats, which lower a note by a semitone, the range of key names can start from the base C to D, E, F, G, A, B and most of the semitone names in between them. The initial note that denotes both the scale and the key is referred to as tonic. From the tonic note, a scale is built with a set pattern to produce a certain sound and certain moods. A major scale sounds lively and joyful while a minor scale sounds darker and more somber. The production of a major scale requires the following pattern ascending from the tonic note: two whole steps (moving over two adjacent keys on the piano), one half step, three whole steps and then another half step. Figure 1 below depicts the construction of a C Major scale on the piano with the highlighted keys.

Figure 1. Construction of a C Major Scale.



The example presented above, C Major, is simple since there are no sharps or flats required in order to fit the pattern for a major scale going from C to the next (octave) C on the piano. The counterpart to the major scale is the minor scale which has this pattern of pitches: one whole step, one half step, two whole steps, one half step and then ends with two whole steps. A minor is chosen for the same reason as C Major for the major scale demonstration.

Figure 2. Construction of an A Minor Scale.



The minor scale has a few variations, called the harmonic and melodic minor scales, in which some of the pitches are altered to form different sounds in case there are different functions needed in the music. This essay will not focus on these scales since the basics are much more important. In summary, each scale, whether major or minor, will have eight notes to comprise an octave. This designates the key and the mood for the song.

In a similar way, the idea of a tonic the ancient Greeks had *tonoi* that centered around a mode. According to Plato, certain *tonoi* placed together would form *harmoniae* to produce the “orderly nature of music which resonates in both man and philosophy<sup>13</sup>”. These *tonoi* create the centers for the modes and produce a similar affect in mood depending on the pattern in which the *tonoi* are placed. However, the ancient Greeks’ constructions of music were not based on the same eight-note octave pattern described above. Our modern system of Western keys and key signatures began to be used widely in the mid-18th century. Moreover, ancient Greek constructions of music were based on four-note patterns to determine the quality of the entire mode. These four-note patterns each had their own quality. When two were combined together in

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<sup>13</sup> Crickmore 2006:22

succession, it resulted in the construction of a mode. Each tetrachord spanned the space between the notes which equated to the interval of a perfect fourth. This interval is the same across the major and minor scales as the interval from the tonic to the fourth note in the scales. e.g., from C to F in the C Major scale. Two perfect fourths together would span an octave, similar to a scale, to make a modal scale. Figure 3 below is the construction of the C Ionian modal scale that resembles the C Major scale starting on C and ending with the final on C. However, it must be

Figure 3. Construction of the C Ionian Modal Scale.



Made clear that the above representation did not exist as a mode until the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an addition to the Renaissance mode names<sup>14</sup>. The scale above depicts a simple representation of the tetrachords which make up a modal scale in a familiar key, C Major.

Modal music can lack the sense of stability and predictability that is present in modern tonality, such as major and minor scales. For instance, an informed listener might easily predict when a piece is going to end and may be able to determine the final note of the progression in the key of the song. This concluding action at the end of a song is called a cadence. Such a construction offers closure and resolution to the music. Modal music is not always required to start on the pitch on which the scale is based<sup>15</sup>. This is why that pitch is called the “center”. In the modern construction of the Greek modes, even though the modes are technically identified

<sup>14</sup> Palisca 1984:226

<sup>15</sup> Mountford 1920:40

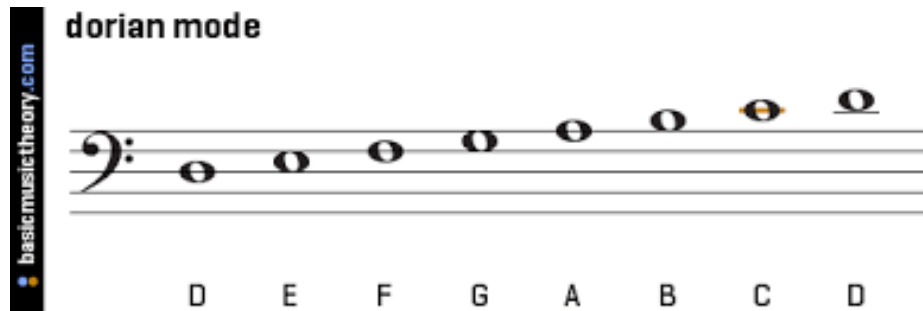
by the ancient Greek culture from they originated and even resembled, there is a pattern for identifying them. Since modern constructions include the two modes added from the medieval Renaissance notation, Ionian and Locrian, the order of modes is as follows: Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian and Locrian. The pitch is identified around which the music/mode is centered. That pitch will most likely be the one which is most frequent or neighbored in the music<sup>16</sup>. Then, the scale is ordered from the pitch center. Using the pitch center, identify the number of flats or sharps I the modal scale which would resemble the key signature for a major scale. After identifying the major scale which it resembles, find out on which scale degree of the major scale the pitch center for the modal piece falls. That scale degree number on which the modal pitch center falls thus determines the type of mode from this order: I, D, P, L, M, A, L. This order of letters is the mnemonic for the modal scale names. It can also be referred to and remembered as “**I** **D**on’t **P**arty **L**ike **M**y **A**unt **L**ola”. For example, if a modal piece is centered around the pitch D, then the scale will be called D “ \_\_\_\_”. If there are no sharps or flats on any of the pitches in the scale and therefore in the piece of music, then that would correspond to the key signature of the C Major scale, which has no sharps or flats. In a C Major scale, D, which is the pitch center of the modal piece, would fall on the second note of the C Major scale. Therefore, it is necessary to refer to the second letter of the mnemonic for the modes which is D, standing for the Dorian mode. The piece and the corresponding scale would thus be in D Dorian. The figure below represents the D Dorian scale and how resembles the C Major scale except starting on D and

Figure 4. Construction of the D Dorian Modal Scale.

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<sup>16</sup> Mountford 1920:41





having D as the final note on the modal scale. Another way to tell if something is in the Dorian mode is looking at the scale once it has been constructed from the pitch center. For instance, D Dorian looks very similar to the D Minor scale. However, the D Minor scale would need a B-flat in order to fulfill the pattern of whole steps and half steps set for the scale as mentioned previously on page 2. The D Dorian scale does not have the B-flat, but a B natural, which has been raised by one half step. This half step thus creates a tritone, a very harsh-sounding interval which consists of six half steps, between the B natural and the F natural earlier in the scale. This tritone gives the scale, like most of the modal scales, a feeling of wandering and lack of direction to which the listening ear is accustomed in the tonal and predictable major and minor scales. It also makes the scale a little difficult to hear and sing. This B natural, or the sixth scale degree (further notated as  $\hat{6}$ ) of the scale, is a tell-tale sign of the Dorian mode. Any scale which resembles its natural minor scale only with the sixth scale degree raised by a half step is set in Dorian mode.

Throughout history, the Dorian mode has undergone changes in construction and conception since the ancient Dorian Greeks first employed it. Most of the instances of the Dorian mode consist of scales which, for the most part, actually start on the pitch E in ancient Greek music<sup>17</sup>. This would mean that in the scale, there would be both an F-sharp and a C-sharp going

<sup>17</sup> Shirlaw 1951:137

up from the low E center to the high octave E as the final. Today's conception of the Dorian mode usually resides on having D as the pitch center and final since it is easier with no sharps or flats in the scale and therefore in the piece<sup>18</sup>. Although it is the same pattern, the sound becomes different when associated with a different center and final. Although modernized and used in jazz music, the Dorian mode has stayed relatively the same in terms of feel and construction since the Renaissance<sup>19</sup>. The pattern of whole steps and half steps have not changed since the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the idea of similarity to the natural minor of the pitch center with a raised  $\hat{6}$  have been unaltered. Since the pattern remains the same, the Dorian mode retains one of the most unique aspects of any mode: its symmetry<sup>20</sup>. The pattern of the Dorian scale, seen through the slight alteration of the natural minor scale which it resembles would like this: W-H-W-W-W-H-W (here, "W" represents whole steps and "H" represents half steps). The two tetrachords which make up a Dorian scale are mirror images of each other in terms of intervals between the notes. Both D to G and A to D in the D Dorian scale depicted above in Figure 4 is represented by the pattern W-H-W with a whole step in the middle for G to A. Despite the slight lack of direction as heard in the scale with the tritone of the raised  $\hat{6}$ , the ear can latch onto the inherent symmetry present between the intervallic space of the notes in the scale. This may be why the Dorian mode is the most widely used in the modal chants and music still played in masses and cathedrals all over the globe<sup>21</sup>. The overwhelming presence of Greek-based Renaissance modes in the church is precisely why Greek modes are referred to as the church modes<sup>22</sup>. The church modes may not resemble the Greek modes in their original notation or pitch construction, but it is this modern "church mode" convention classified in this essay are the Greek modes as modes themselves,

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<sup>18</sup> Denniston 1913:90

<sup>19</sup> Shirlaw 1951: 135

<sup>20</sup> Monro 1895:80

<sup>21</sup> Mountford 1920:27

<sup>22</sup> Mountford 1920:25

even though they were not viewed that way in the musicianship of ancient Greece. The Dorian mode also shows up in classical composers' sacred symphonies, for example, John Sibelius' *Symphony No. 6* and Ludwig von Beethoven's "*Et Incarnatus Est*" movement from his *Missa Solemnis*. Both works whose composers were praised for their sense unity and symmetry in each piece<sup>23</sup>. Jazz musicians such as Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock have also implemented Dorian modal structures to their style in songs such as "Maiden Voyage" (Hancock), "Milestones" (Davis) and "So What" (Davis). The popular alternative band Green Day utilizes a Dorian melody in their hit song "Wake Me Up When September Ends".

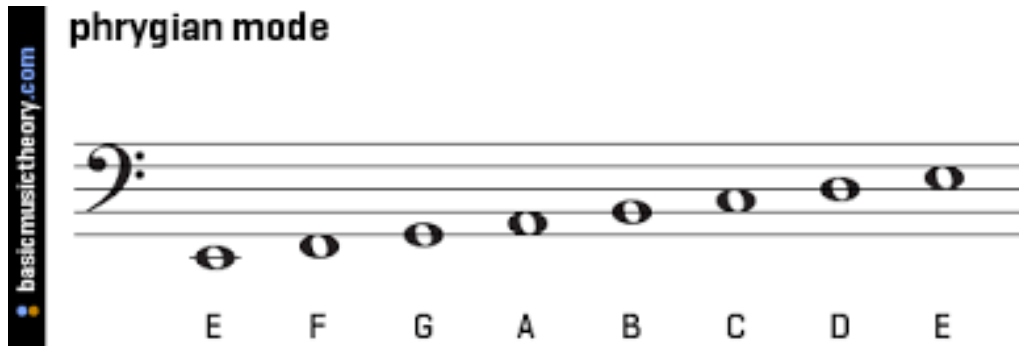
While the Dorian mode is actually one of the most popular modes employed today in church settings its importance in the culture in ancient Greece is not as clear<sup>24</sup>. While the Dorian mode is one of the modes that this essay is focused on, it is also important to discuss some other modes as well that will illustrate the differences of aestheticism as seen in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. The next mode to examine is the Phrygian mode. By using the same process as described on page 4, the simplest scalar representation for the Phrygian mode is E Phrygian. With E (hypothetically) as the pitch center and no sharps or flats to resemble the C Major scale, E is  $\hat{3}$  in C Major and thus corresponds to the third mnemonic letter, "P" standing for "Phrygian".

Figure 5. Construction of the E Phrygian Modal Scale.

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<sup>23</sup> Solomon 2010:516

<sup>24</sup> Solomon 2010:517



Similar to the scale of the Dorian mode, Phrygian resembles the natural minor of its pitch center quite closely. The difference between the Phrygian mode and the natural minor scale occurs on the second note. While the natural minor scale would require a whole step in between tonic and  $\hat{2}$ , the Phrygian scale has a half step, also known as a minor second interval. This means that other than the perfect intervals, the fourth, fifth, and the octave, all of the intervals from the pitch center in Phrygian mode are minor in quality. That is, there is a minor second between  $\hat{1}$  and  $\hat{2}$ , a minor third between  $\hat{1}$  and  $\hat{3}$ , a minor sixth from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{6}$  and a minor seventh from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{7}$ . Unlike the Dorian mode, there is no inherent unifying quality that the Phrygian mode has in order to make it used more frequently in the same way that the symmetry does for the Dorian mode.

In fact, as pointed out on page 28 of Bronson's article, the "Phrygian mode in its construction resembles the exotic sounds of foreign and even barbaric lands" due to the definite lack of direction and motion through the scale<sup>25</sup>. This is why, when the Phrygian mode is used, it often is representative of such wild and exotic places that may be foreign to the audience. For example, Romantic composer Anton Bruckner employed the Phrygian mode for his setting of the *Pange Lingua* hymn from Thomas Aquinas, written in Latin. Aquinas' text described the transformation of the bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ, also known as

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<sup>25</sup> Bronson 1972:28

transubstantiation. The mysterious nature of the Phrygian mode only makes it apt to set Aquinas' *Pange Lingua* to music with its inclusion of the mystery of transubstantiation. Modern classical musicians John C. Adams and Philip Glass both utilized the Phrygian mode in order to convey a sense of other-worldliness. This was to be believed to have inspired the original Greek geographical naming of this church mode, since the Phrygians in the mountain ranges were known for their barbarism. Adams uses it in his work *Phrygian Gates* for less-than-subtle reasons while Glass implements the mode in his opera *Satyagraha* which depicts the life of Gandhi in the final aria<sup>26</sup>. Modern film score composer David Shore makes use of the Phrygian mode in the opening sequence of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. The scene is set of a strange fantasy land of director Peter Jackson's mythical epic film, so Shore's accompaniment had to reflect such sentiment<sup>27</sup>. The Epitaph of Seikilos, the oldest piece of extant music, is Phrygian in quality and melody<sup>28</sup>. These settings depict incidences where the customs, rules, philosophies and actions of the pervading culture vastly differ from those of the audience. It is this sense of feeling out-of-place that is provided in the construction of the Phrygian. Plato and Aristotle will use these notions of the barbarism of the Phrygian mode to disparage its practice and usage within the realm of music in light of the propensity and tendencies of its *ethos*.

The next mode to discuss is the Lydian mode. The simplest representation of this mode comes in the form of F Lydian where F is the pitch center and there are no sharps or flats in the remainder of the notes in the scale. Resembling the C Major scale with the starting note and final

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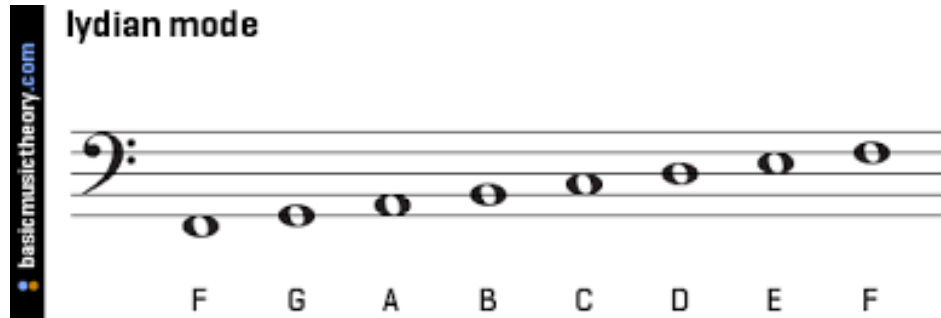
<sup>26</sup> Pike 2000:46

<sup>27</sup> Solomon 2010:521

<sup>28</sup> Pike 2000:47

note of the modal scale being F which is  $\wedge 4$  in C Major, the fourth letter in the mnemonic must be used to determine the modal scale type.

Figure 6. Construction of the F Lydian Modal Scale.



However, the significant difference that occurs in the construction of the Lydian scale, which sets it apart from both the Dorian and Phrygian is that this scale resembles the Major scale. This corresponds to its pitch center, not the minor scales of the Dorian and Phrygian modes. As an example, in the F Major scale, there is only one altered pitch, and that is a B-flat in order to satisfy the intervallic pattern of a major scale. However, the F Lydian scale does not contain a B-flat, but a B natural. Similar in construction to the D Dorian scale, the B has been raised by one half step to make the construction of this modal scale.

This relation between the D Dorian and F Lydian scale may be slightly confusing, but just for clarification, this B-flat/B natural similarity between the two modal scales occurs because of the simple conventional representation chosen in order to construct these modal scales. Modal scales, by nature, might start on any pitch for it simply requires a center, not a tonic like tonal scales (i.e., major and minor scales), therefore, there is a modal scale for each note in the modern system of twelve tones – one for each piano note name, or pitch class. The Dorian scale is not required to start on D, the Phrygian scale on E or the Lydian scale on F. The simplest conditions are chosen to construct these scales, so there are some similarities that may look similar to the

same notes placed in different orders and arrangements. For instance, all of the modal scale examples have the same notes contained within the C Major scale. What matters is the underlying pattern in the construction of the scale itself. Each modal scale example, despite having the same notes, has a different intervallic structure, which makes for a different pattern for each modal scale.

The Lydian scale features a distinct tritone between its pitch center and  $\text{^4}$ . Yet, with all the major qualities the modal scale possesses, this raised pitch presents less of a challenge to both hear and sing for musicians and the untrained ear. Take for example, the opening melody for the theme song of the popular animated FOX series, *The Simpsons*<sup>29</sup>. When the title of the show is sung, the center and almost tonic feeling of the note C is definitely present as it is sung on the first word of the title theme song, “*The*”. However, the note sung on the next syllable, “*Simp-*”, is a clear tritone and raised  $\text{^4}$  in F# (F-sharp). While the original  $\text{^4}$  in the C Major scale would be F natural, this raised feeling alteration provides ample evidence to suggest a move away from the idea of a diatonic “key” to a modal setting. Of course, the last syllable of the title of the show in the theme song, “*-sons*”, ascends directly up the C Lydian scale to the G natural, only one half step away from F#, raised  $\text{^4}$  in C Major. While the tonal sentiment is C Major, musically, the F# pervades throughout the theme song to suggest a leading tone to G Major,  $\text{^5}$  in C Major. Other genres have embraced the feeling of the Lydian mode. This is evident in Simon Sechter’s *Messe in der lydischen Tonart* (“Mass in the Lydian Mode”), which is a very rare extended use of the Lydian mode in music, and jazz music from John Coltrane and Miles Davis. This mode, which sounds so close to the major scale, or, Ionian mode, is popular because of its ability to sound so pleasing even with the tritone as part of its original

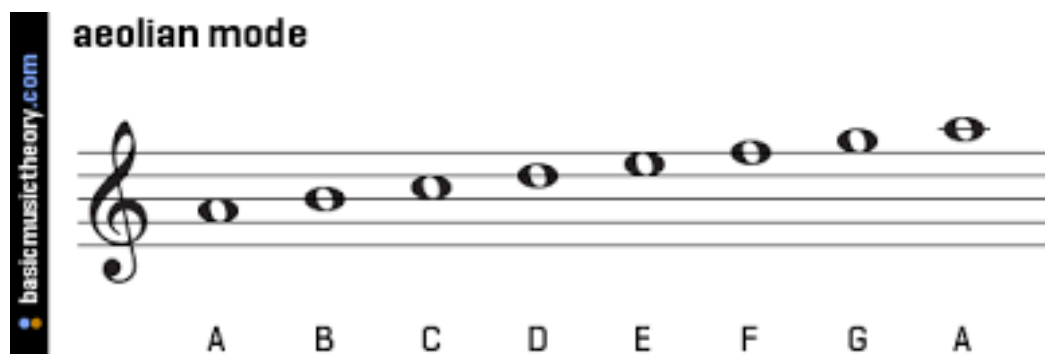
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<sup>29</sup> Solomon 2010:518

construction. Although both major and minor scales have tritones in their constructions, the placement of the tritone is what matters most to the ear and, by extension, the affect on the audience. The Greek geographical region after which the mode received its nomenclature, Lydia in Anatolia, was a culture highly founded upon function and progression – these two words also have great meaning in music. A progression refers to the predictable path that the chords of a song will follow, as in the motion of a cadence mentioned on page 4. The progression gives function to the notes and chords to have a specific order. This functional order determines the reason for why a note or chord has been altered, as in the case of being raised a half step. In the Lydian scale, raised  $\hat{4}$  has a tendency to move very much to the next scale degree,  $\hat{5}$ . This is similar to a  $\hat{7}$  to octave function in a major scale. The relationship between the culture and the modal name may not be coincidence and therefore becomes even more meaningful when Plato and Aristotle separate the goodness of the modes, dependent on their affect and relation to the culture they musically represent.

The final mode to discuss relevant to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle is the Aeolian mode. By following the process described on page 4, the simplest scalar representation of this mode would be A Aeolian as seen in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7. Construction of the A Aeolian Modal Scale.





The construction of this mode is much less complicated. The Aeolian scale is constructed in the same way as the natural minor scale of the pitch center of the mode. The same number of whole steps and half steps in the same coinciding pattern described on page 2 apply here. While the musical analysis of the Aeolian mode is less interesting because it is the basis for the modern-day minor scale, the origins of the mode tell a much more intriguing story. Aeolian refers to the Greek islands of Aeolis, where the inhabitants were known to have written their original music in this mode. These Aeolian islands were adjacent to the coastal district of an area of land known as “*Asia Minor*”. While this may be a slight coincidence, since the musical term “minor” was only conventionalized around the late 18<sup>th</sup>-Century, it is highly probable that ancient writer Cleonides inspired other musicologists to associate the word “minor” with the mode from that geographical area, the Aeolian mode<sup>30</sup>. Cleonides is also credited for recording the Aeolian mode as also known as the “Low Lydian *tonos*<sup>31</sup>”. In this sense, the Lydian scale, with lowered  $\wedge^3$ ,  $\wedge^4$ ,  $\wedge^6$  and  $\wedge^7$  resembles the natural minor scale of the pitch center for any mode. By lowering tones of the Lydian, the result becomes the natural minor scale, or the Aeolian mode. Since the Aeolian mode is synonymous with the natural minor scale of modern music, it is difficult to say that piece is technically modal and not simply in the minor key. However, one piece of music that most closely resembles a modal fashion in terms of off-color melody and harmony is Bob Dylan’s “All Along the Watchtower”. This song, although seemingly in a simple minor tune, features such distinct narrative structure and chordal differences that do not have a conventional progression of the minor key, that many scholars and musicians believe Dylan’s work to be modeled after a modal, i.e., Aeolian, premise<sup>32</sup>.

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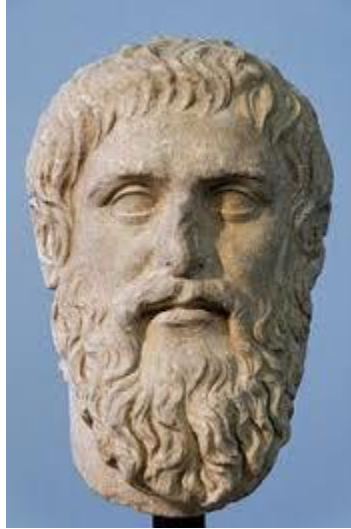
<sup>30</sup> Solomon 2010:523

<sup>31</sup> Solomon 2010:523

<sup>32</sup> Solomon 2010:523

Although there are several other modes that could be expounded upon and introduced, the four presented are the most crucial to understanding the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies which categorize them into either good or bad. It is this categorization of a culture's expression is the turning point between the rise and decline of the aestheticism of the modes – and music as an expression as a whole. The moral interpretations imposed on some of the modes are positive, and bolster the argument that music can be inherently good in itself as expression and work as art. However, the divergence that is also implemented by these philosophers shows that music, articulated by the modes, is not good in itself, but only as a means to feel a certain way, a means to an end. It is this teleological outlook on music that places value on the effect that the music can produce rather than having naturally inherent value. Further analysis of the construction of these four modes and their relation to the culture which they represent show simultaneous bias and exclusion by Plato's and Aristotle's descriptions and procedure for acting (or not acting at all) upon listening to these modes as music or as a means to feel a certain way. This effect may still be seen today in the musical contests where it is a goal to be better at music than your opponent. Winning the prize or the highest score creates the dignity of the artist(s), which is exactly the point of Nietzsche's "Homeric Contest". Plato and Aristotle come together in their works to form a support for music and its intrinsic goods. However, they also aid in the destruction of the inherent aestheticism as both attack some of the modes and the cultures which the modes represent.

## CHAPTER 2

Plato's Thoughts and Views on the Modes

Although Plato was not by any means a musician in practice, some of his philosophy drew heavily on the knowledge and theory that music had to offer. The order and the value that music harbored contained the potential for leading men into great lives as leaders with great moral standards and values. For instance, Plato is accredited for saying that “Philosophy is the highest music<sup>33</sup>”. In this quotation from Plato’s *Phaedo*, Plato insinuates that music and philosophy are not only intertwined with each other, but they are necessary for one another. This necessity also steers one into the direction of “The Good”, which is the ultimate goal for knowledge and happiness for Plato. Things that are described as good and beautiful are those which conform to the nature of beauty and are good in themselves as they help make those who study and appreciate them more well-rounded individuals fit to be leaders, i.e., Plato’s “philosopher kings.” For in fact, musical education and the knowledge of the affects of the modes is necessary for the education of the guardian class as well in Plato’s *Republic*. The Good

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<sup>33</sup> Bailey 2005:95.

and the beautiful are connected in their essences for Plato – a view that contrasts with the view of the aesthetics. Plato considers mathematics to be the most beautiful and purest embodiment of beauty due to its incontrovertible truth which transcends the realm of sheer imagery as “universal, unchanging and necessary<sup>34</sup>”. While mathematics is placed highly in the areas of study which can lead to The Good in the *Republic*, Plato also mentions the importance of music and the mathematical nature it can represent. The mathematical goodness of the modes in tandem with their resultant moods bridge the gap between the Good and the beautiful. In this sense, Plato puts forth a view of the modes which creates meaning and importance to the feelings associated with the modes. However, Plato’s view is also one tainted by a political agenda full of censorship as it imparts conditional goodness to some of the modes. As aestheticism disassociates the beauty from the good in arts such as musical modes and as Platonic philosophy scrutinizes the modes’ goodness under the lens of a political agenda, there needs to be a middle ground where the connection between the beautiful and the Good works in tandem with a holistic experience of all the modes without censorship.

Music has the unique properties of being both aural and legible. Music can be both heard and written and there is an art to both actions. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this essay, there is a certain degree of space between the notes that are heard as played music and the notes that are written on a piece of staff paper. This spatial relationship that music embodies is the reason for a common nickname for music: “spatial geometry.” There is a mathematical element in composing the melodies and harmonies to make music resonate as an expression and reflection of the soul. The purpose and affect of music is therefore intertwined with the mathematical composition, i.e., the spaces between the notes and intervals used in the melodies and harmonic structures. While

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<sup>34</sup> Bailey 2005:96

these mathematical relationships between the intervals of the notes are not readily apparent in musical harmony, the ear of the listener can still resonate and be pleased with the innate order and beauty that is present. The construction of the melody, harmony and music altogether represents a mathematical order and reflection of the order of the soul itself. Knowledge of this relationship in music is not only key to understanding music as an instrument whose inherent value extends toward The Good, but it is pivotal to understanding music as a reflection of the self. Therefore, the knowledge of the construction of music becomes paramount to knowledge of order and becoming closer to The Good. Music then becomes extremely important in Platonic philosophy. However, Plato praises only some of the modes as good, better or “pure” in the context of his philosophical dialogue. Plato imposes conditions on the other modes which, depending on their affects that they have on their audience, results in the refusal of acceptance into the State which Socrates and Glaucon are creating. Just as Plato seems to encompass all sorts of avenues into his account of the well-rounded person going toward The Good, he categorizes modes within themselves and puts limited value on that which he already considered good altogether. This conflicting view of the modes as music with intrinsic educative value now becomes an agonistic drive for being better and yielding the better result. Plato accepts some modes and condemns others based on the political agenda he has for them. These combative qualities Plato puts onto the modes are a reflection of the overall conditionality that the modes harbor based on the affect they produce in their audiences. These combative qualities, in tandem with the conditional categorization is the basis for such an agonistic position for the modes in Platonic philosophy. This agonistic view is based on conditional goodness of the mode which, by definition, means that the inherent goodness, quality and value of modes and music becomes compromised and limited to the end result.

The main text in which Plato addresses the importance of music by way of the musical modes is his *Republic*. In Book III, Plato speaks to his interlocutor Glaucon about the qualities of the guardians of the metaphorical city to represent the mind and how it should be ordered. Plato makes use of the musical modes and the affects which they have on men who listen to them, play them, or live by them. One of the two modes that Plato deems acceptable and permits entry into the city is the Dorian mode<sup>35</sup>. For in Book III, Plato says “οὐδαμῶς, ἔφη: ἀλλὰ κινδυνεύει σοι δωριστί (Dorian) λείπεσθαι καὶ φρυγιστί (Phrygian)<sup>36</sup>”. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this essay, the Dorian mode is based on the minor scale with a raised sixth scale degree (^6). According to the culture, the Dorian mode comes from the reference of the Dorians (or Doric culture) in northern Greece. Their clash with the Ionians led to the Peloponnesian War. The military state of Sparta esteemed the Dorian culture and the phrase “ἦ τὰν ἦ ἐπὶ τᾷς”, which the Spartans adopted from the Dorian dialect, became a motto for the high martial integrity to which the Spartans held their soldiers<sup>37</sup>. These references to a martial attitude gave the Dorian mode a serious, military and even sometimes reverent feel. Many Gregorian chants that are used in church masses are in the Dorian mode for the implied reverence to God that the mode represents. However, as the changes from the original Greek modes to the Church Modes came into effect, the distinctive B natural which was significant of the D Dorian scale was lowered by one half step to B-flat in order to avoid the tritone of B and F<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, with an ordered and secure feeling to the composition and the background to the modal structure as well as the cultural attitude linked to it, Plato deems the Dorian mode as permissible into the State for guardians to learn and adopt as

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<sup>35</sup> Plato, *Republic* Section III.399a. Translation by Reeve.

<sup>36</sup> Translation: “None at all, he said. But, it seems you have left the Dorian and the Phrygian (modes).”

<sup>37</sup> Translation: “either with it or upon it.” The “it” refers to the shield which is issued to the Spartan soldier and the phrase itself is in reference to the condition in which a soldier would return from battle. If the soldier is with the shield, he has returned alive and if he has returned upon it, he has died in battle.

<sup>38</sup> Shirlaw 1951:138.

part of their training and education. Plato would identify this mode as “pure” and “simple” in his dialogue with Glaucon in the *Republic*<sup>39</sup>. The simplicity of the Dorian mode is what Plato finds to be beautiful and temperate. For instance, Plato describes “leaving the mode (implying the Dorian mode) that would fittingly imitate the utterances and the accents of a brave man who is engaged in warfare or in any enforced business<sup>40</sup>”. These attributes are similar to the attributes which the souls of the guardians of the State must embody. With the order of a military pattern or formation, which a good guardian should know and embody well as a guardian in Plato’s *Republic*, the Dorian mode provides a clear example of the pure and beautiful mode of music which has value of being an extension to knowledge and the good. This extension helps make modes like the Dorian, and later, the Phrygian, become essential in understanding the musical and philosophical beauty, purity and goodness it provides.

As a musical structure, the Dorian mode is laid out in Chapter 1 of this essay as the natural minor scale with the exception of the raised  $\hat{6}$  (sixth scale degree, or “la” in solfège syllables). In the simplest form, the D Dorian scale would include unaltered pitches from one D to the next octave D. This scale would thus contain the harsh and unexpected tritone of F and B-natural. However, this tritone becomes important when discussing the musical meaning of “pure” as opposed to Plato’s philosophical meaning of pure as it applies to the extension of knowledge and goodness. For instance, the musical purity of a piece of modal music is dependent upon the range in which pieces yields its melody. This melodic range is called the ambitus<sup>41</sup>. The musical purity of the mode remains intact if the ambitus does not dip far below or above the octave span of the modal scale. In the case of the Dorian mode, which is a scale whose simplest form is based

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<sup>39</sup> Plato Section III.399a. Translation by Reeve.

<sup>40</sup> Plato, Book III.399a. The Greek here is ἀλλὰ κατάλειπε ἐκείνην τὴν ἁρμονίαν, ἣ ἐν τε πολεμικῇ πράξει ὄντος ἀνδρείου καὶ ἐν πάσῃ βιαίῳ ἐργασίᾳ πρεπόντως ἂν μιμήσαιτο φθόγγους τε καὶ προσφθίας. Translation by Reeve.

<sup>41</sup> Solomon 2010:499.

on the octaves from D to D, going to the C or even the B below the low D in the scale's octave would retain modal "authenticity and perfection". If the ambitus is exceeded further than what is considered authentic and perfect, it is classified as plagal or imperfect<sup>42</sup>. In most of the chants and remnants of ancient Greek music that is classified as Dorian, the ambitus is not far exceeded and the modal authenticity of the range and the perfection of the melody remains intact<sup>43</sup>. It becomes more evident that the Dorian mode, whose various melodies required a strictly authentic and perfect ambitus, maintains a "pure" status in Plato's philosophical rendering of the mode. In addition, even when the ambitus of the Dorian mode dips below the sub-final C, the modal half step created by the B-C relationship resembles what would be similar to a leading tone function in modern harmony. So, when the melodic ambitus dips to the B of the Dorian mode, it does not feel as though it has dipped too far as it comes only a half-step back up to the sub-final C. This proto-leading-tone sound may have helped the D Dorian mode more easily retain its melodic authentic status in music as well as having a pure status in Plato's *Republic*. Just as the melody for the Dorian mode remains authentic and perfect within the strict realm of its ambitus, the souls of the guardians for Plato's state should mimic such an adherence. If the souls remain temperate and reverent, then the guardians will know and maintain their positions in the State. This maintenance and knowledge of one's place is one of the various definitions of Plato's ideas of social justice, a topic which is discussed pervasively as the crux of the *Republic*.

As Socrates questions Glaucon even further in the *Republic* about the musical standards of the State, another mode which Plato discusses as permissible is the Phrygian mode. The Phrygian mode named for the Phrygian culture which initially harbored the area in the southern

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<sup>42</sup> "Plagal" comes from the Greek πλάγιος, "oblique, sideways". Plagal is also a reference to a musical cadence ending wherein instead of taking the standard perfect musical cadential progression of V-I (*sol* to *do*), the progression is IV-I (*fa* to *do*). This progression is most commonly found in antiphonal mass music on the word "alleluia". In fact, this is where the nickname for the plagal cadence originates – the "alleluia cadence".

<sup>43</sup> Tillyard 1916:142.



Balkans. However, the culture went through many periods of wars and political turmoil which resulted in periodic relocation to their final destination of Anatolia by way of the Hellespont. Aggressors who engaged in battle with the Phrygians included the Cimmerians in 690 BC, the neighboring Lydians of Croesus and the Attalids of Pergamon<sup>44</sup>. This unrest caused much movement and relocation as the Phrygians become parts of the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great, Alexander and eventually the Roman Empire. Their language was distinct from the Latin, Greek and many other ancient Indo-European languages, but was most closely related Greek in structure and dialect. Plato is credited for seeing the similarities that the Phrygian language had to his own native Greek language in his *Cratylus*<sup>45</sup>. However, the Phrygian language was not the only part of the culture that either interested or influenced Platonic thought and philosophy. Of the two modes that Plato speaks of as permissible, the Phrygian mode is the other mode besides the Dorian.

As noted earlier, the two main attributes of the Dorian mode which Plato praises is the military-like order and mental temperance it seems to provide to the subjects who listen to it. As much as the Dorian mode was a reflection of the Dorian culture, the same can be said for the attributes of the Phrygian mode as a reflection of the Phrygian culture. “Vehement and passionate” are the words that most scholars use to describe the Phrygian mode as affects of the music unto its listeners. However, Plato’s view includes an additional attribute. Plato uses the example of a man trying to make peace bearing himself in a moderate fashion. For he says in Book III, “καὶ ἄλλην αὖ ἐν εἰρηνικῇ... καὶ μὴ ὑπερηφάνως ἔχοντα, ἀλλὰ σωφρόνως τε καὶ

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<sup>44</sup> Pike 2000:45.

<sup>45</sup> Pike 2000:45.

μετρίως<sup>46</sup>”. Along with militant order, passion and vehemence, Plato offers the affect of the contemplation of one’s sobriety. Much like the Dorian mode’s attribute of mental temperance, Plato’s view of the Phrygian mode contains an element of social temperance. Yet, there seems to be a contradiction with these attributes. For instance, the guardians of Plato’s State must have a courageous, militant and albeit vehemently passionate attitude in order to do their jobs as the protectors for the city. Inciting the passions in this regard does not seem to fall in line with the Platonic notion of social drinking temperance as a permissible attribute in his State for the guardians. For instance, it has often been noted that Alexander would get passionate and enflamed even and especially after partaking in the imbibing of wine – sometimes to the point of excess<sup>47</sup>. Ultimately, while seeming angry and passionate simultaneously, his roles as commander and soldier became intertwined as he was passionate for battle and victory.

Although these attributes for the Phrygian mode seem incongruent, scholarship shows that Plato’s affinity for the Phrygian language may account for his acceptance and delineation for these attributes. While it was stated earlier that the modal ambitus retains musical authenticity and temperance for the Dorian mode, similar features accompany the Phrygian language. Plato discusses in his *Cratylus* that the Phrygian language has “smooth and even tempo along with a moderate fluidity and euphony<sup>48</sup>”. The smoothness and the temperance of the Phrygian language for Plato may in turn reflect his reasons for retaining the Phrygian mode in the State. The linguistic properties of the Phrygian language mirror a social temperance. Drinking as a social aspect of life must require a certain temperance so as not to engage the evils of insobriety and drunkenness. In this way, Plato keeps the Phrygian mode because of the musical fluidity and

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<sup>46</sup> Plato, III.399b. Here, Plato makes an example of a man in apposition to what he deems to be the affect of the Phrygian mode. The translation is “And another for such a man engaged in works of peace... and not bearing himself arrogantly, but in all this acting modestly and moderately”.

<sup>47</sup> Lippman 1963:201.

<sup>48</sup> Pike 2000:46.

social temperance of the Phrygian language itself. Since the music is an extension of knowledge, a similar plane on which language could be held for Plato, the Phrygian mode contains aspects of the Phrygian culture both socially and linguistically. Therefore, the passion, vehemence and military musical construction of the mode accompanied by the fluid linguistic properties it retains from Plato's study of the Phrygian language allow it to be acceptable as a mode for study in Plato's State. In a sense, Plato is striking a balance between sobriety and passion with the elements of this mode.

While Plato accepts the modes like the Dorian and the Phrygian, he despises the Lydian mode for its affects. On one hand, the Dorian and Phrygian modes promote order and temperance, the Lydian mode exercises lamentation and a stirring sadness which Plato and Glaucon had already discussed not to be a part of the emotional vocabulary of the guardians and Philosopher Kings. For example, Plato asks his interlocutors about the "dirge-like" modes (θρηνώδεις ἁρμονίαι) and they immediately respond with the Lydian mode and the Mixolydian mode, a slight variation on the Lydian mode<sup>49</sup>. This mode is seen as musically plagal, or not authentic due to its range and ambitus in most existing works<sup>50</sup>. This lack of restraint could be the philosophical reasoning for Plato's rejection of such a mode. While F is the simplest pitch center for a melody in the Lydian mode, the B natural that would be the raised <sup>4</sup> (scale degree 4) acts as a leading tone to the C in functional harmony. This tritone from the pitch center and final of the scale, F, disrupts the order of a functional scale because of the harsh sound as well as the lack of focus as a modal piece. This lack of center represents the inner torment and depressive sadness which Plato believes to detract from the Good, or, authentic happiness in life and social justice.

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<sup>49</sup> Plato, III.398e.

<sup>50</sup> Solomon 2010:503.

What becomes problematic here is that, as it will be later stated in Book VIII from Aristotle's *Politics*, modes like the Lydian and the Phrygian are both associated with the Greek αὐλός, or the flute<sup>51</sup>. Flutes, and by extension flute players, were considered “orgiastic and enthusiastic” and reveling in pleasure of the body and ecstasy, not the pleasure in attaining true happiness<sup>52</sup>. This contradiction goes to show that not only were there discrepancies in the affects of the Greek modes between the ancients themselves, but there is a conditional value placed on the modes as music. This conditionality taints the modes as an understanding that they can be an extension of knowledge and the Good. Plato picks out two modes that he believes are good because of the innate musical aspects which he deems philosophically fit for permission into the State to be studied by the philosopher kings. However, the Lydian mode, although it is associated with sadness and lamentation in both Plato's and Aristotle's minds, contains similar patterns of construction with the minute change of the placement of the tritone in the scale. The similar construction but different pattern signifies the subjectivity of the perception of the conditional goodness of the mode as music. Plato deemed the Lydian mode to be bad because of the affect which he imposed upon the scale as he thought it would incline its listeners to think, act and make such actions habit. Even for the good modes, the dependence of goodness is placed on the result of the mode and not in its inherent musical value. This categorization of good and bad puts the modes into a competitive scope where one art is better than another. Music becomes only as good as the feeling it evokes, and this conditionality does not align with the Good and unconditionally beautiful things which Plato allows into the State and into his philosophy.

In terms of an aesthetic approach to the modes as music, such an intellectualism in viewing does disconnect the emotionality of the modes' affects in order to view them in an

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<sup>51</sup> Spector 2013:6.

<sup>52</sup> Palisca 1984:226. Palisca cites Aristotle's Greek text from *Politics* Book VIII.v

uncensored and pure way. The audience experiences the art as representation of their minds' experiences and do not rely upon singular and objective message which the artist or instrumentalist may have in mind when the art was originally made or performed. With such a disconnect, the modes may be experienced on a scale that dwarfs Plato's limited view and acceptance due to his harsh censorship. However, this censorship may need to be taken with a grain of salt since many scholars find irony in Plato's view of the modes and music's role in education itself. For instance, says that the truth that Plato conveys may not be "as much a reflection on the modes as music, but a reflection on the human condition and the need for strict education, especially for spirited individuals like the guardians in Plato's *Republic*<sup>53</sup>". Plato's censorship may not need to be taken as literally as it is written in his dialogue. The message must more broadly emphasize social justice stemming from the order of the parts of the city (correlating to the parts of the soul) rather than emphasizing the order of the musical modes and their importance. However, irony aside, even if Plato's view of the modes in his education of the guardians and Philosopher kings in the *Republic* may not be as agonistic as literally written, music itself still takes on a political agenda as a means of proper education. Some modes are bad and some modes are good in Plato's philosophy. Yet, the modes are still music and representations imitating the many different affects – exposure to which would make an individual a more "well-rounded emotional being<sup>54</sup>". This well-roundedness of exposure to all the modes contradicts to the strict educative regimen Plato instantiates in the censorship of the modes which only promote a limited range of emotional affects. Less censorship as well as a more submerging experience of all the modes creates the middle ground necessary to appreciate and ground the self in the knowledge and affect in order to control which feelings to merely

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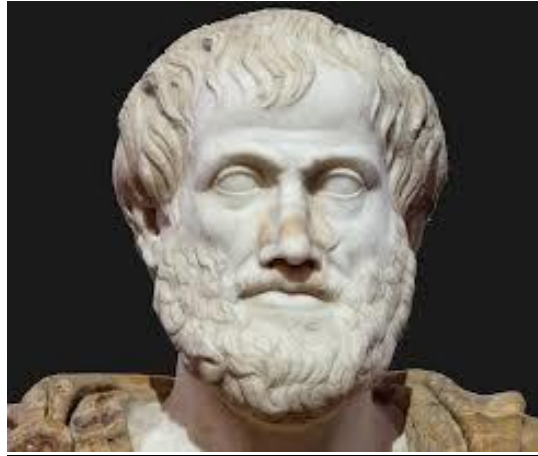
<sup>53</sup> Crickmore 2006:38.

<sup>54</sup> Henderson 1989:32.

imitate and which to habituate as the person, or guardian or ruler in Plato's terms, one needs to be.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Aristotle's Thoughts and Views on the Modes



Much like his predecessor, Aristotle was a philosopher whose musical talents or thoughts did not emerge beyond the extent of his philosophy. Although Aristotle speaks of music more in thought and occasionally in practice, his views of music and the modes influence the cultural aesthetic as to how the mode should be deemed and viewed by those who read his works. For example, Aristotle regards music as having the ability to “produce virtue” and become one of the “greatest joys of men<sup>55</sup>”. He talks about the properties of music heavily throughout Chapter VIII in his *Politics* and in his *Poetics*. However, the music itself is not the subject of Aristotle’s philosophic writings, but the imitation and the true ability for music to be related to the soul comes into question. Aristotle’s main focus when writing on music comes about in the education of children – an act that is deemed “political” in nature because education allows for speech to develop and therefore political life can begin. This ability to move the soul is what Aristotle wonders about music in order to deem it necessary to keep in the educational curriculum. For Aristotle says that the modes can be “imitations”, but they are “signs of moral habits... For [they] are essentially different, and those who hear them are differently affected by each<sup>56</sup>”. Here again is an indication that the affects of the musical modes have an important connection

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<sup>55</sup> Aristotle *Politics* Chapter VIII.v. Translation by Lord.

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle *Politics* VIII.v. Translation by Lord.

between the emotion and the value associated with each mode. As much philosophical theory is stressed throughout Aristotle's *Politics* and *Poetics*, he does delve into the descriptions of the modes and their affects which may not affect the soul, but imitate it and really take charge of the mind.

Much akin to Plato's thoughts on the Dorian mode (Aristotle refers to it as Doric), Aristotle believes that the Dorian mode has positive and virtuous effects on its listeners. For instance, Aristotle believes that the Doric mode fixes the listener into a "firm and settled state" (*Politics* VIII.v). This firm and settled state must be linked to the military background and cultural derivative that Doric modal music possesses. The firm ambitus range of the Dorian mode that does not stray too far from its final notes proceeds in a military-like fashion. The Dorian rhythms that Aristotle associates with Doric harmonies feel as though they "march along" as an army ready for battle would be<sup>57</sup>. This sense of security and control that is placed on the Doric mode is agreed upon by both Plato and Aristotle. The similarities by which both philosophers describe the mode in relation to its affect provide a strong account for the general feeling and affect that the Doric mode emitted when it was played on the lyre or other instrument. To Aristotle, the only music that could result in this state of mind and soul was specifically the Doric mode. It is praised for its structure and firmness, but since the Doric mode is the only mode that is given such praise from Aristotle, his views start to clash with Platonic philosophy. These differences do not only affect the modes themselves as worthy to study, but music itself and what it means to both philosophers.

The next mode that Aristotle in his *Politics* is the Phrygian mode. As stated earlier, the Phrygian mode for Plato was linked to the sobriety of the Phrygian language as well as the social

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<sup>57</sup> Aristotle *Politics* Chapter VIII.v. Translation by Lord.



temperance and strength regarding the mode's musical structure. While these attributes were Plato's reasons for accepting the mode for musical study and achieving the Good as an extension of knowledge in the State, Aristotle disagreed. The Phrygian mode for Aristotle represented the "orgiastic" qualities of the flute players as well as "enthusiasm<sup>58</sup>". While the enthusiasm could seem positive in other contexts, the meaning here for Aristotle is the naïve enthusiasm for superficial happiness, like that of an orgiastic nature. The flute players and their light-hearted tunes could "fill the ears, hearts and minds of men" with the little nuggets of illusory joy in life<sup>59</sup>. However, this joy does not reflect the same amount of happiness that is equivalent to Plato's Good or the social standard of education in Aristotle's *Politics*. This discrepancy is interesting because it points out one instance of subjectivity, even within the ancients, as to how music should be perceived by its listeners. This subjectivity opens up an entire field of questions concerning the similar good involved in Plato's Good and Aristotle's *Politics* and *Poetics*. Ultimately, my focus of understanding is the categorization of modes as good and bad due to their affects. The affects as set forth by both Plato and Aristotle create a layer of doubt and subjectivity over which they attempt to make objectivity for studies. This point will be further discussed as Chapter 3 concludes as well as in the Conclusion portion of this essay.

In addition to the rejection of the Phrygian mode, Aristotle also rejects the Lydian and the Aeolian modes for their affects and imitations of the mind. Aristotle credits the Lydian mode to be capable of making men sad and feeling that sort of emotion<sup>60</sup>. While this affect is not necessarily bad in itself, the context under which Aristotle posits its other attributes reduces any possibility for positive connotation. Aristotle claims that both the Lydian mode and the Aeolian

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<sup>58</sup> Denniston 1913:92.

<sup>59</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* Chapter VIII.iv. Translation by Lord.

<sup>60</sup> *Greek Music* 1894:738.

mode have the potential to make its listeners “soft in the mind” to the point where it can “dissolve one’s heart<sup>61</sup>”. As opposed to the Doric mode which had “Olympic glory” at its heart every time the tune was played, the Lydian and Aeolian modes has features that made them seem sad and therefore resulted in the imitation of the mind to feel sad as well. For Aristotle, the weakness as represented in the Aeolian mode would lie in the structure of the modal scale. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the simplest Aeolian scale is based on the note A and proceeds along the natural minor scale so that it follows the pattern of W-H-W-W-H-W-W (whole steps and half steps). The natural minor has the distinct feature of having a half step in between  $\wedge^2$  and  $\wedge^3$ . This half step makes the scale sound darker and gloomier in contrast to the major scale which has a whole step in between  $\wedge^2$  and  $\wedge^3$ . This whole step makes the major scale sound as happy as it does. The major scale is also referred to as the Ionian mode for the ancients while the major scale is a modernized conception of scalar tonality. In this way, the minor mode, or the Aeolian mode, is associated with the sadness and darkness that would soften a man from being the gloriously strong Olympian that the Doric mode would imitate.

However, just as in Plato, similar problems with Aristotle’s conclusions on the goodness and badness of modes are contradictory to his overall acceptance of music in both thought and in practice. In Chapter VIII of Aristotle’s *Politics*, he concludes in the last paragraph that music is an art that “people should be instructed in” due to its “influence over the disposition of the mind<sup>62</sup>”. Insight into how one’s mind can be affected by the different dispositions of the musical modes is important to understanding the politics of living as a good citizen in Aristotle’s *Politics* as well as understanding certain music as “good” to listen to in the *Poetics*. Music, on the whole for Aristotle, is seen as a good thing which represents an imitation of the mind and experience of

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<sup>61</sup> Aristotle *Politics* Chapter V.56. Translation by Lord.

<sup>62</sup> Aristotle *Politics* Chapter V.258. Translation by Lord.

the soul through sound. Music, as seen in the modes and their effects on the mind and soul, is a good that is an extension of the positive things that are necessary to live as good citizen for Aristotle. However, not all of music seems to be positive. While the Doric mode and sometimes the Phrygian mode are permissible as worthy to study, and learn about, Aristotle makes claims about the affects of the Lydian and Aeolian modes which represent negative effects unto its listeners. This categorization puts the modes at odds with each other again in an agonistic and competitive way. If music as a whole is a good thing, then why is it that there are only certain modes or certain musical melodies which are deemed as good enough while others must be rejected? The other modes accomplish similar goals in that they allow their subjects to experience different emotions from different aspects like the harmonies, or even the pattern of the modal scale and melody itself. Based on the cultures in which Plato and Aristotle lived, only the modal affects which seemed to be in line with the manly attributes they sought for themselves in their philosophical notions were accepted as worthy of musical study. This subjectivity puts music in odds with itself since both Plato and Aristotle even said that music is a “good”. Good in this context defines something which is an extension of knowledge as well as not conditioned in worth by anything other than itself. This good that music has harbors imitations and reflections of human nature as represented by the spectrum of emotions and feelings each mode can evoke in their audiences.

In both cases of Plato and Aristotle, music is seen as an extension of the Good and an avenue towards knowledge. Hence, both philosophers use music as a platform for educating future leaders. The education is not directly linked to the act of ruling itself, but to the values of emotion and habituation; of which the leaders must have sufficient knowledge in order to do their jobs well as guardians or Philosopher Kings. These leaders must order their souls so that

certain parts, i.e., the reasoning, spirited or passionate portions, are in command for most of the time so that their jobs are done well as an active citizen and the *polis* can function properly. With this, Platonic justice and Aristotelian political life may flourish. However, as the aims can sometimes be misaligned in the order of the soul's parts, Aristotle and Plato may be hinting at a misalignment in music itself – that is, there may be a tension within the aims, or what they think the aim(s) of music, the modes, must be. Consider the difference that each philosopher has when viewing the Phrygian mode. While Plato accepts it into the *polis* for his perception, Aristotle rejects it because of the way he perceives its affects. There is tension here in the viewpoints which may reflect the “modal tension” which Amy L. Shuster demonstrates in her article about the modes of theorizing in Aristotle's *Politics*. “The different theories from each of the ancients regarding the musical modes demonstrates the subjectivity and tension that music *can* have given the limited scope of each philosopher<sup>63</sup>”. What Shuster is saying is that since Plato and Aristotle have such a censored and political agenda under which they scrutinize the musical modes for their agonistic worth and educational value, the accounts for the subjectivity and devaluation of music makes sense. As opposed to the purely aesthetic view which takes, not a completely objective approach, but more intellectual approach, the ancient philosophers are so rooted in the emotions which they believe the modes will habituate that exposure to all would create disorder and distance from knowledge and the Good. On the contrary, I believe that considering all the modes for their values and how each mode's affect molds one's emotions brings one closer to the self and understanding how one's mind is shaped. Of course, over exposure to the modes which yield either extreme pain or senseless euphoria may not be the best choice. So, there is need for a balanced intake for a more well-rounded emotional development in order to promote a healthy self-knowledge in order to commit to one's role as a citizen to the best of one's ability. The

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<sup>63</sup> Shuster 2011:614.

ensorship of the ancients' political agenda for the modes does not promote this development, but rather stunts it as well as stiling the knowledge of emotion that all of the musical modes have to offer.

## CHAPTER 4

### Conclusion

This clash of agendas that is demonstrated in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle brings this essay to its final statements about the musical, ideological and philosophical need for a more holistic and compromising context for a discussion of the value of the Greek musical modes. Modal music, much like any other music that was heard in ancient times and even in modern settings, is a reflection of the human condition of order, soulful resonance and emotional

attachment that we place upon the importance of music in our lives because of the ways it makes us feel or imitate emotions. Both Plato and Aristotle agree that music is a good thing and the modes are appreciated as musical concepts, constructs within Greek society and links to the nature of the beautiful and Good. However, as Plato and Aristotle begin to divide the modes within themselves as a good/bad categorization, music itself seems to lose its inherent value that was affirmed by the philosophers in the first place. In his dialogue, Plato questions Glaucon about the seemingly known principle of the goodness of music and then arrives at a conclusion whose essence never changed from what was questioned in the beginning. Music is a good thing that has unconditional value which helps us understand ourselves as an instrument to attaining knowledge and worth as we strive for the Good. Music helps us realize that our expressions can hold value as connections between the good and beautiful. The construction and spatial geometric properties also offer a mathematical avenue for intellectualism, if the emotions were to be taken out of it. Without the censorship of the ancients and the disjunction of the beautiful from the Good of Aestheticism, the musical modes can take on agendas that can not only serve the ancients' political agendas and the purely intellectual agendas of Aestheticism, but it transcends them. Music as many goods and purposes since it resonates so well with us. Aristotle begins with various statements on the goodness that music brings to society through quotations from prior speakers and, similarly, arrives at the same conclusion as what was started with – music has worth and the modes are worth studying in order to be a well-rounded person and citizen of the *polis*.

And yet, music had complications within itself to detract from the value it has in both Plato's and Aristotle's works. The Dorian mode is the most important while the Phrygian mode, Lydian mode and the Aeolian are cast aside due to their musical construction, cultural

background and social status as to where and by whom, or on what instrument, they are played. The Dorian mode is better than all of the other modes based on subjective views that taint the overall perspective of the philosopher. Both Plato and Aristotle argue for the necessity of music due to its goodness and importance in education. These claims signify a one-sided end goal for the institution of music into the lives of those who aspire to make themselves the best they can be within the context of political life and utility for the *polis* rather than utility to the development of the individual. Yet, the subjectivity of the agonistic categorizations of the modes suggest a conditional aspect to music, i.e., the result that the music produces in its listeners. This focus on the produced feeling is what makes the modes for Plato and Aristotle conditional and therefore lacking in inherent and aesthetic value from their political points of view. The competition held within the modes as good or bad makes the modes themselves questionable in philosophical goodness altogether.

A survey study was conducted by Peter Dykema which included the musical knowledge of 100 students who learned music because they liked it and those who learned music in order to win a competition. The competitions were fairly standard and the students were of the same age-group with the same musical understanding and background. The results would be measured by the students' abilities to accurately describe the feeling in accordance with an analysis of the same musical compositions. The results of the study concluded that the students who learned the music for a competition and out of an agonistic value towards music knew less than the students who listened to the music because it resonated with them on an aesthetic plane. The agony of competition obfuscates the value that is obviously present in music, since it can be used to judge a choir in competitions, and taints the overall perspective of its goodness. This same instance happens in the case of Plato and Aristotle. While both can agree that music has worth and the

modes are expressions of us as human beings, the fault lies within the lack of acceptance of all the modes as music, and not the rejection of the modes which only resonated with certain habitual qualities or behaviors which the philosophers believe the modes would instantiate in its audiences.

If music is a reflection and extension of humanity's search for knowledge and self, it must not be viewed in a light which pits it against itself. Instead, the Platonic and Aristotelian views on music should have incorporated the range of human goodness as humans, which are flawed beings. In this way, the modes which Plato and Aristotle saw as bad and unworthy, would show only a different kind of valuable virtue, not a vice. After all, Aristotle does say that these affects which the modes represent are imitations in which the mind is "tricked and deceived" into thinking it must express emotion where one is not necessary<sup>64</sup>. While an unhealthy diet of exposure to only one certain mode may promote a habitual action that is considered not virtuous on the grounds of a moral standard, a more balanced immersion into the modes and their affects on an individual's soul-order would result in a more well-rounded individual more in tune with their self-knowledge and emotional compass. Virtue may not always be the immediate goal or intended outcome for writing, playing or even listening to music, like the modes, jazz, pop or any other genre, but the importance of the feeling is still there, whether the listener considers themselves "musical" or not.

As far as the modes go, modal music today is not always seen as bad or weird since it is not strictly "tonal", like most pop music is. For example, Miles Davis and other jazz musicians use modal constructions in order form colorful arrangement which express multitudinous affects; some of which, neither Plato nor Aristotle would approve of. However, just as there are choir

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<sup>64</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* Chapter 3.105. Translation by Apostle, Dobbs and Parslow.



competitions where the music is judged on how well it affects the audience, there are jazz competitions where the color of the chords and the technical abilities of the musicians are scored in ways that reflect the resultant feelings of the specific judges. Just like Plato and Aristotle, the scores for these modal constructs are subjective and can be confined to conditional goodness. But, the music itself, should not be conditional. The order, disorder, harmony, dissonance, melody, cacophony tonality and modality are all representations, imitations and extensions of human life and feeling. They are supposed to be good for what they are because they are. They are extensions of the self and all of the things which help make us human in our feelings and emotions which we express in different ways with one other and even ourselves. Putting such avenues of expression through the lens of an agonistic competition only manifests itself in ways that deny the true value of that which is judged in the first place. The same concepts apply to music as Plato and Aristotle have showcased with the mode and Peter Dykema demonstrated with modern students and the music they work with in their lives and cultures. The value may not be readily apparent for some, but that only means that there is a requirement to look deeper into the music which you think is meaningless, worthless or just “bad”. On the other hand, it might require a deeper look into oneself to see whether or not there is an understanding of the value of music as it is good in itself as an extension of knowledge and the good and beautiful things about humanity.

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